

Rainbow Days



Dianne Z Stevens
illustrated by Daniel D Stevens

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by Dianne Z Stevens

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Preface

The stories in this collection are based on my life experiences as an eleven year old sixth grader in Highwood, Illinois during the 1954-55 school year. They are recorded as I remember them, which may or may not be as others remember them. The dialogue is made up to complement the story line and is as true as I could make it to the spirit of the people and situations involved.

I began writing these stories about forty years ago. It is thanks to a number of people that I have completed them, including Marilyn Schairer, Ellen Maurer, and Ellyn Kroupa, who all encouraged me to keep writing; Sharon Kennelly, my editor-in-chief; my husband Paul, who gave me endless technical help and grammatical assistance; my son Dan who drew the wonderful illustrations; and most of all, Lynne and Karen, who lived these adventures with me.

Dianne Stevens
January 2015

*Opposite Page: Mr. Waller's Sixth grade, Oak Terrace School
1954-1955 (Karen was absent this day.)*





Dianne and Lynne in Sixth Grade



*Karen in Seventh Grade
after her hair cut*



We found ourselves in the gymnasium

I Begin Sixth Grade

Aunt Musa walked me the two blocks to school my first day of sixth grade. Another new school. I had just started to feel comfortable with the kids in fifth grade, and now I had to start all over again, all over again. We walked past the playground swarming with brightly clad children I didn't know. Instead of deserting me with them, Aunt Musa took me past the oak trees, right up and through the big front doors of Oak Terrace School. I was immediately aware of the distinctive school smell. What was it? Crayons? Chalk dust? School wax on the school floors? We found ourselves in the gymnasium. Aunt Musa led me up a tall flight of stairs to an office above the front door. She announced to the owlish woman at the desk that we were here to register Dianne for 6th grade. The woman scrolled a paper into her typewriter and began asking questions which Aunt Musa answered authoritatively:

“Name?”

“Address?”

I was concentrating my nose on the “school smell.”

Owlsh continued, “Mother's name?”

“Deceased!” answered Aunt Musa loudly.

I turned red and squirmed in my chair. I hated this. I wanted to be anywhere else than here. It was like she was pinning a sign on me, “Motherless Child.” It was bad enough being bigger than everybody else! Now the whole school would know I was different, just like fifth grade.

We left the office. Aunt Musa called a cab and departed. I was directed to my sixth grade class. A bell rang. Children thronged noisily through the corridor just beyond. I felt very alone, a stranger in the large empty gym. As the noise dimmed to an echo I screwed up my courage and entered the hallway, passing room after room full of chattering happy voices. “They all know one another. They

already have friends.” The words bounced around my brain exaggerating my fears.

Finally I came to a room at the end of a hallway with a sign that said 6-2 and in big black letters, Mr. Waller. A man teacher! Wow! This is different. I entered tentatively and found an empty desk near the back by the window. Whew! No one seemed to notice me. I looked around at the kids buzzing happily, as we awaited the teacher.

“Hello there!” I jerked around to see who had spoken softly in my right ear. I met a pair of bright brown eyes. The girl had wavy auburn hair pinned neatly with a pink barrette, a sprinkle of freckles across her nose and a smiling mouth almost too big for her face. And she was big like me. “My name is Lynne,” she said. “I’m new here.”

Suddenly all my anxiety just melted away.

“Hey, do you know what makes that school smell they have around here?” I asked her.

“Oh that! That’s from the school paste they keep in all the closets,” Lynne answered.

I knew I had a friend. All was right with the world.

Lynne

That very first day I realized Lynne was going to be an unusual friend. For one thing she had a purse. For another, in the purse she had a thick book with no pictures and I saw her actually reading it! Mostly I read comic books. I had a stack of Mickey Mouse, Uncle Scrooge and Elmer Fudds as high as the top of my bed.

“Can you really read such a fat book?” I asked.

“I discovered in 4th grade,” Lynne explained, “that a fat book is no harder to read than a skinny book. You just start out and after several pages you get so engrossed in the story you really don't know whether it's fat or skinny.”

We walked to class together and around the playground. We were partners in cooking class, competed on looking up words in the dictionary in English, and in finding state capitols in Social Studies. It had never before been this exciting to work hard in school.

In the fall I was invited to ride the school bus with Lynne to her home after school. It was a long bus ride. Lynne lived on the edge of the district on Old Mill Road, near Skokie Highway on the west, and Lake Forrest on the north. She and I and her brother, Marcus Aurelius Fortunatus Tidd, were among the last to leave the bus. They lived in a little brick house down a long driveway out of view of any other building.

As soon as we entered I noticed the small piano with a book on the music rack that said *Chopin*. “Can you play?” I asked. “Can you play that piece by “Chop-in?” I had seen that name before.

“That's 'Show-pan' my dear.” She sat down and played. The room was filled with the big full chords of a Chopin Prelude.

“Wow! O Wow! How can you play so many notes at once?”

“It's not so hard once you get used to it,” she explained. “That's the piece I played at my recital last spring. I had to play it three times. The first time I made a teeny mistake, the second time the teacher didn't like my dynamics, but the third time it was perfect!”

“Weren't you embarrassed?” I asked.

“Not a bit. She made lots of kids play their pieces over. In fact, the only ones who didn't play theirs more than once were the worst players. Because, you know, some people simply have no talent and when they try hard, well, you just can't ask for more than that.”

I was a beginning piano student and wondered silently if I would be asked to repeat pieces, or would I be classed with the talentless.

Then we went into Lynne's room. I don't know what I expected but I was very surprised to see it filled with dolls. There were well worn baby dolls, rag dolls and beautifully clothed storybook dolls, dozens and dozens of them.

“My goodness,” I exclaimed, “do you still play with dolls?”

Lynne answered smiling with no hint of having been insulted, “Yes, I know, there's a cultural taboo against any but small girls playing with dolls, but so much depends on your point of view.” She then told me the stories of several of her dolls. Some of



Do you still play with dolls?

them were people from earlier generations of her family. Some were great people from history. “This one is Martha Jefferson who died before her adoring husband became president. He grieved for her for the rest of his life.”

Then Lynne picked up a tall beautiful doll with long black hair dressed in a flowing robe of salmon satin. “Now this doll, I call Nefertiti. Did you ever hear of her?” Lynne asked.

“No,” I answered solemnly.

“Well,” continued Lynne, “she was a great Egyptian queen. She tried to bring a new religion to Egypt based on love and kindness and the worship of only one God. This happened over 1300 years before Jesus was born. Can you imagine that?” Lynne's eyes got big and round as she asked the question.

“Well what became of her?” I asked.

“The world wasn't ready for her message. I suppose she died and went to heaven,” Lynne replied.

I stared at Lynne. Did people really go to heaven? I dearly wanted to know. I wondered what Lynne really thought. The question was on the tip of my tongue but I held it back as Lynne continued to tell about her dolls. Then the topic switched to menstrual cycles. Lynne was already having hers. I wasn't. I had only the foggiest idea of what one was.

“Yours will start soon too, I'll bet. You're like me. It's not really that we're big. We just got our growth early. We're more mature for our age than most girls.”

I liked the idea of being like my new friend, so knowledgeable and wise. I wanted to tell her about my mother. Surely she would understand.

“Do you really believe that people go to heaven when they die, if they've been good and all that?”

Her answer was swift and confident. “I certainly do. There's much more to life than what we can see and hear and measure. A human spirit is a beautiful vibrant thing that can't be bound simply by a body. My father has said so many times.”

I replied, “I want to believe that but sometimes I'm not sure.”

She looked at me intently and asked in a whisper, “Who died?”

“My mother!” It had been almost two years but it was still incredibly difficult to talk about. Then the whole story of my mother, her illness, her death came pouring out.

“I was in fourth grade. I had finished my arithmetic and was watching the teacher give a lesson to the fifth graders about Eskimos. The clock above her head said 1:20. Suddenly I thought, my mother might die! And then I told myself, no! Kids mothers don't die. I didn't know anyone whose mother had died. And so, I forgot about it.”

“She had had a stroke the summer before. She couldn't walk, she couldn't talk very well either, and she had to be in a wheelchair. But everyone said she was getting better every day and I guess I believed them. And then she died on October 29th, my brother's 13th birthday. It was the very day and at the very time that I had first thought about the possibility of her dying.”

Lynne gasped.

“My daddy was very sad. He loved her so much. At night he'd pace up and down, up and down the hallway outside my door. I'd get up and go out. Sometimes we'd play cards. I kept wondering why it was he hadn't called the doctor and taken her to the hospital that morning. One night I finally got up enough courage and I asked him. He explained that she had this massive stroke and there was nothing he nor anybody could have done to save her, and then I asked him what time she had died. He answered, 'One twenty.'”

That was really the first time I had told anybody. It was a hard secret but good to share.

Lynne was attentive and sympathetic. I couldn't believe she had tears in her eyes. Actually we both did. Then she asked me about the part of the story where I described looking at the school clock and imagining my mother's death at the very instant she died. Lynne thought I had ESP and explained to me what it was. I swore her to secrecy, that she wouldn't tell anyone at school about my losing my mother. I didn't want anyone else saying I belonged in an orphanage like they had in fifth grade.

After awhile our mood brightened and we went on to talk of many other things. We discussed movies. We discovered we both loved Sigmund Romberg musicals. We sang songs together from *The Desert Song* and *Rose Marie*. I went to movies every week and wanted Lynne to come with me, but she could only go with an adult along. I hardly ever went with an adult along. Who was my favorite movie star? Hers was Michael Rennie.

“He's British you know. He's such a fantastic human being, so elegant and handsome. He's obviously very intelligent. He was

in *The Robe*. You must see it!” He had sent her his picture which she showed me. It had an inscription in the corner, “To Lynne with warm regards, Michael Rennie.”

“I’m going to marry him someday,” she said with assurance. I had never thought of a movie star in that way but I suddenly wanted to have a favorite too, so I said mine was James Mason. He was the only male star I could think of. I had just seen him in “Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea” as Captain Nemo.

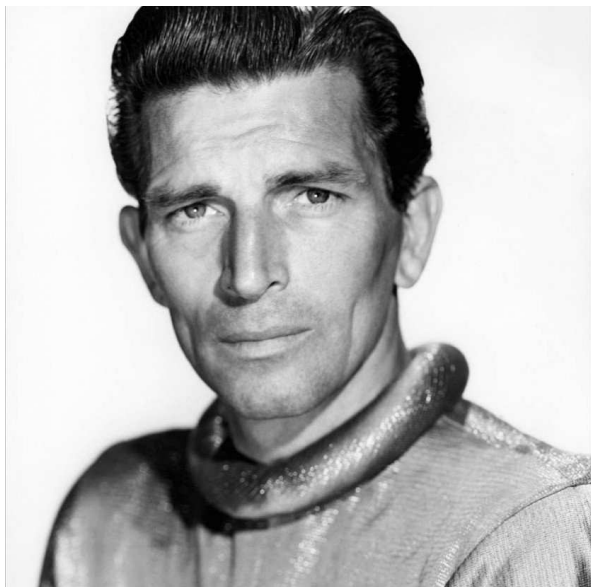
She also told me about her parents. Her father was an elementary school teacher. She always spoke of him with reverence. It was clear she adored him. He was very involved with a certain secret group, and Lynne swore me to secrecy before she told me about it, the Urantia Society. I asked Lynne, “Is that a religion?”

“Yes and no, not exactly,” she replied. “Their book is coming out soon and it’s going to change the world. It’s a secret society. It covers religion, life, science, history, everything. I’m not supposed to talk about it, so please don’t tell anyone.” I promised I wouldn’t.

Lynne’s mother had been one of Lynne’s father’s students. Now she worked as a telephone operator. Both parents worked so Lynne was responsible for Marcus after school.

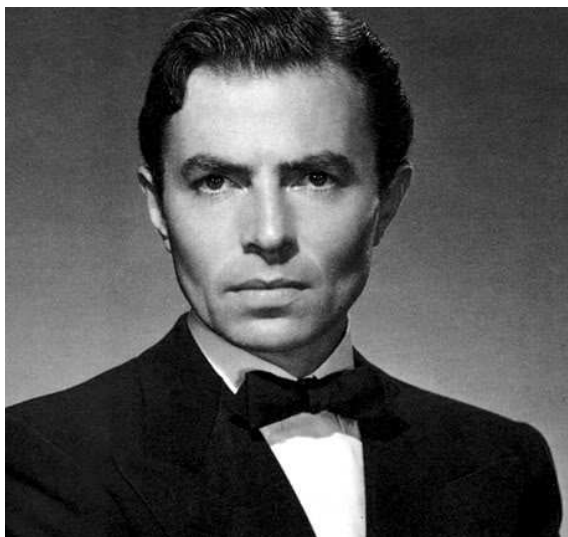
“Mercy me!” she exclaimed suddenly, “I almost forgot about Marcus.”

I had wondered about Marcus. I saw him for the first time on the bus ride. He was about three years younger than Lynne. With such an incredible name and such an unusual sister he must be a boy genius of some sort. I thought we’d go find him in his room which would be all wired up with flashing lights and buzzers or



Michael
Rennie

James
Mason



Our movie stars

else he'd be reading Plato in Greek. Instead, we looked out the window and saw Marcus Aurelius Fortunatus Tidd playing in the sand box with his trucks.

Soon our glorious afternoon came to an end. Lynne's parents arrived home and then, my father came for me. As I was going out the door Lynne pressed into my hands one of those fat books with no pictures. It was *The Foreigner* by Gladys Malvern. "Now remember, just read the first few pages and you'll forget it's a fat book, and then we can talk about it," she said, as if talking about a book was the most delightful thing two girls could do. And at that moment I was sure it was ... along with singing songs and sharing secrets.

Karen

I had a quarter burning a hole in my pocket. Instead of going home after school I walked past my house, down a long block and into the Ben Franklin Five and Ten Cent Store. I walked to the back of the store and looked slowly over the supply of comic books. I had read every one except for *Archie* and *Superman* which didn't interest me. Even though Lynne was teaching me to read fat books, I hadn't yet broken my addiction to comic books.

As I meandered to the front of the store I noticed it had started to rain. In fact it was pouring! The only other people in the store were the lady at the cash register and a girl in a blue sweater over by the thread. Thinking she looked familiar, I ambled toward her to get a better look. She was smaller than I, quite slim, and wore her hair in two pony tails. When she looked up at me I recognized her blue framed glasses from class. Oh yes, I thought, that's the girl who's always so slow at everything.

“Hi Dianne,” she said with a slight smile.

“Hi!” I replied. “You're in my class. What's your name.?”

“Karen.”

“Do you live around here?”

“Yeah. Just around the corner,” and she pointed towards the main part of town where all the stores and taverns were. Highwood was a working class Italian community with wealthy Highland Park on two sides, Fort Sheridan army base to the east, and an undeveloped area to the north. Highwood was famous for its taverns. My dad used to call it the town of 2,000 people and

36 taverns. And they were all well patronized by the soldiers from Fort Sheridan. I wondered where she could live in the direction of downtown.

“Are you going to do some sewing?” I asked.

“Nope. My mom needs lavender thread.”

We walked to the front. Karen paid for her thread. We stood by the door watching the rain.

“I live right down this street,” I said. “You should come over sometime. I’m new here. I don’t know many people.”

“Yeah, sure,” said Karen absently.

And then the rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun. We stepped out into a clean sparkly neighborhood with a fresh wet smell.

“Look!” Karen exclaimed, pointing towards town. “There’s a rainbow!”

We stood there several minutes gazing at the beautiful colors in the sky. As it started to fade I said, “Well, I’d best be going.” I turned and started to walk down Everts Court. Karen fell into step alongside.

“Oh! Are you coming with me?” I asked with surprise.

“You invited me, didn’t you?”

“Sure! Great!--but don’t you have to take your mother her thread?”

“Yeah, sure! I'll take it when I go home!”

I was still under the spell of the rainbow. Here I was walking down the street in a bright clean world with a brand new friend. I absentmindedly put a skip in my step. Soon we were both skipping and giggling down the sidewalk.

I took the key out of my pocket and started to push open the door, then hesitated. What if the house were a mess. What would my new friend think? She might be one of those fancy rich kids, like I went to school with last year. She might even have a maid! These thoughts raced through my head in a split second, but before I could think them all, Karen squeezed past me into the kitchen. And my! Was it a mess! There were dirty dishes and food on the kitchen table as well as on the dining room table. Papers and clothes were scattered about willy-nilly. Cupboard doors were open. And there sat the cat in an open desk drawer, licking the stamps.

“Nice place you got here,” said Karen. “Got anything to eat?”

Before I could say “Sure,” she was helping herself to the bread and peanut butter left on the table.

“Where's your mom?” she asked.

“She's dead.” I was surprised how easily those words came out after having explained it to Lynne.

Karen wanted to see the rest of my house. She wanted to play the piano. She wanted to play with Oscar, my talking teddy bear. She wanted to pet the cat who had only wrecked a few stamps. She opened my brother's bedroom door.

“Don't go in there!” I shouted too late. Jon's room was always a heck of a wreck. We didn't have a city dump that I knew of, but he was still finding junk to drag home. No one could stop him. The rest of the house was messy; his room was chaos. The bed was unmade, but it didn't matter because you couldn't see there even was a bed. Every surface was covered with cords, wires, vacuum tubes, old clocks, radios, toasters.

“My brother likes to fix things,” I explained.

“Looks to me he likes to break things,” was Karen's comment.

I decided we should go outside. She wanted to ride my bicycle, so we took turns riding it up and down Everts.

Soon brother Jon arrived home looking irritable, closely followed by Aunt Musa looking tired and crabby. Karen decided it was time to go home. She had enjoyed riding my bike and wanted to borrow it 'til after dinner. I said, “Sure.”

When Daddy came home he said I should not have let her borrow it. She might keep it and it could be unpleasant to retrieve it. But right after dinner, here came Karen, bringing back the bike.

Karen's Home

I was walking home wondering what to have for lunch. Suddenly a voice piped up at my shoulder. "Why don't you make one of those peanut butter sandwiches and bring it to my house. We can take the bike."

I jumped. "Karen! Do you read minds or something? Won't your Mom mind?"

"Naw. She said she wants to meet you."

Actually it sounded like a good idea. Our hour-and-a-half lunch break did get a bit long and lonesome at times. We stopped at my place, I made the sandwich and we put it in the bike basket. I had never ridden anyone on my bike before but I had seen other people do it. I took the driver's seat, Karen climbed on the back fender, and after a wobbly start we were making respectable progress down Everts. When we came to the center of town we walked the bike past a drug store, a liquor store and a barber shop. Then there was a bright green door between the barber shop and a tavern, The 400 Club. We parked the bike along the wall and entered the green door. Karen led me up a long dark flight of stairs and into a sunny living room directly above the tavern.

"Hi Mom!," she called.

"Sh! Keep your voice down," said her mother quietly. She was seated at a sewing machine in the corner of the living room working on a bright blue garment. All about her were baskets and piles of fabric and sewing things and a clothes rack bulging with garments on hangers.

Karen introduced me to her mother who smiled above her glasses. She said she was glad to meet me and that Karen needed a friend. She looked older than I thought she would be but she had kind eyes and I knew at once she really was glad to meet me. She directed us to the kitchen where lunch was set out and I met Karen's younger brother, David, who was eating and watching "Two Ton Baker" on the TV and obviously enjoying it, laughing at every joke.

"Does he really weigh two tons?" I wanted to know.

"Sure. Doesn't he look like it? Listen to this. What's a Boobee Bird?" David was full of jokes.

David continued barely giving me time to say I didn't know.

"Well, you see, it's this little bird in the forest. He hides behind a tree and every time a bee comes by he pops out and says, 'Boo, Bee!'" He burst into a bout of laughter big enough for all three of us. I was right. This was better than being home alone.

Mrs. Poelman was at the door. "Please be quiet children. You'll wake up ... "

But it was too late. Another door opened and there stood a gray man. His hair was gray, his face was gray. He wore a shabby gray bathrobe over pajamas. He looked like a ghost. I had never before seen a person that color. "Can't you keep these kids quiet?" he asked in a tired voice, and then disappeared behind the door with a long sigh.

"Yes, children, do be quiet," Mrs. Poelman implored and returned to her sewing.

We finished our lunch more calmly. When it was time to return

to school, Mrs. Poelman patted me affectionately and told me not to think too much about David. He was trying to be a comedian. She told me to come back soon and I thanked her. She didn't mention the ghost.

David took off like a shot down the street and Karen and I rounded the corner and climbed back on the bike. It was already beginning to feel easier to have her on the back fender.

"Is your dad sick?" I asked as it didn't seem she was about to volunteer anything.

"Yeah," she answered. "He has this weird blood disease. Mom says he might die."

"Oh!" I replied, not knowing what to say. I wondered what it would be like to know your parent might die. "I'm sorry." That seemed like something a person could say under the circumstances. "I guess he doesn't work then, huh?"

"Nope, hasn't worked since spring."

"So what does your family do for money?"

"Mom takes in sewing."

Aha! I thought, that explains all the sewing things and the lavender thread. "You mean, people bring her clothes they want sewed?"

"Yeah, mending, hems--stuff like that. Sometimes she sews for the stores."

I felt great sympathy for Karen, but didn't really know how to express it. So I said, shyly, "It's nice having you for a friend."

“Sure,” said Karen. “Just let me off here.” We were still a block from school.

Oh, no! I thought as I stopped the bike. That must have been the wrong thing to say. “Why?” I asked as Karen dismounted.

“I’ve been late every noon this year. Don’t want to break my record.”

I stared at her in disbelief. It was true. Karen was almost always late and frequently had to stay after school because of it.

“Why don’t you turn over a new leaf and be on time for a change?” I suggested.

“Naw. Teacher might have a heart attack. I’d hate to lose him.”

Karen stood there with her usual absent-minded look waiting for me to leave. And so, not knowing what else to do, I got on my bike and rode to school.

The Great Christmas Card Caper

“No thank you!” said the old woman as she quickly shut the door.

“Rejected again,” sighed Lynne. “You talk at the next house. Maybe this wasn't such a great idea.”

“Oh Lynne, don't be discouraged,” I replied. “I don't care if we don't sell anymore. I think it's fun. Besides, I've never been to this part of the neighborhood before.”

“You are a good sport,” said Lynne affectionately.

Lynne and I were trying to sell Christmas cards. In September Lynne had gotten the brochure in the mail. Her parents had said Lynne could do it if I would sell with her. Of course I was always game for a new adventure. We received the samples and over several weeks, and one outing in Lynne's neighborhood, we'd sold over twenty dollars worth of Christmas cards. Now it was a bleak Saturday morning in early November and we were selling in my neighborhood. We each had plans for the loads of Christmas money we would net with our 30% of sales..

“Though, actually, I've already earned enough for one very special person on my list,” I confided.

“Who is that?” Lynne was curious.

“Have I ever told you about Kate?” I asked shyly.

“No, who is she?”

“Well ... she's this special grown-up friend of mine. Really, she's

a friend of our whole family. She likes all of us. Even Jon! She's always smiling and glad to see us. But Kate's especially my friend because I met her first. She's a housekeeper for this rich family in Ravinia." I explained to Lynne the difference between being a maid and a housekeeper because I wanted her to realize a housekeeper had higher status than a mere housemaid.

"When I'm married to Michael we'll be so rich we'll have a maid and a cook. And a housekeeper too!" said Lynne.

"Oh, really, Lynne!" I exclaimed with disgust and quickly changed the topic back to Kate.

"Is your dad in love with her?" asked Lynne.

"Of course not!" I exclaimed with surprise. "Sometimes he does take her places without me or Jon. That's because he needs someone to talk to. They are just friends." The thought that Daddy could ever love anyone besides our dear dead mother had never entered my head.

"She sounds like a loveable person. I'll bet he's going to want to marry her pretty soon."

"No, I'm sure he won't," I insisted. I wondered why I found the thought so distressing. I adored Kate and told her all my problems. I told her about everything that happened at school, what Lynne said about Karen, and what Karen said about Lynne. But a person could only have one mother!

"She's quite plump," I added as an afterthought.

The sky had turned darker and a brisk wind was nipping our noses and finger tips. "Here, you carry the box awhile. You've got gloves on," I said.

The time passed quickly as we walked along getting a steady stream of "No, thank you's." Then, we found ourselves in front of a large dilapidated house well back from the road. Lynne thought it looked spooky and wanted to skip it. "I'll ask," I said. "Maybe something different will bring us luck." I knocked firmly on the door from which paint was peeling in large flakes. At the end of the porch was a jumble of junk.

"Good grief! This place is a wreck," Lynne whispered as she reached the porch. "Let's skedaddle!"

Just then the door opened. A slight girl in her early teens with stringy blonde hair and glasses peered out at us. I gave our pitch and the girl yelled into the dark interior, "Hey Ma, it's two kids selling Christmas cards!" We stood there nervously and the girl stood there with the door open staring at us. I shifted impatiently. Lynne studied her fingernails. The girl studied us.

"Hey are you two sisters?" she asked suddenly and we both jumped.

Lynne and I looked at each other and started to giggle. "No, we're not." Lynne replied.

"You look like sisters," said the girl vaguely as she disappeared into the house and was replaced by her mother with the same stringy blond hair. She invited us in. The house was a wreck inside as well. She carefully looked at all the pages of our catalog and picked out several boxes of cards plus several boxes of stationery which we didn't even realize we were selling.

"Well you can't tell a book by its cover!" commented Lynne

when we were back on the sidewalk.

“Huh?” I said.

“I mean, I would have thought horrid people would live in such a dingy house and they were really quite nice. Probably intellectuals. Did that girl remind you of anyone?”

“Karen!” we exclaimed together and started to giggle.

“No,” I defended my other friend. “Karen always looks neat. I don't think you like Karen.”

“Karen's alright, I suppose,” said Lynne, “It's just that she's always so--well--you know, Dumb!”

“Now how can you say that when you just said she looks like that other girl back there that you think looks like an inta-whatever-you-called-her.”

“An intellectual, my dear. And I guess you do have a point. It's not so much the way Karen looks that's dumb, it's just, well, the way she acts and the things she says and that ridiculous expression she has on her face all the time. She does LOOK dumb.” Lynne let her mouth hang open and blinked her eyes wide trying to mimic Karen's expression.

It looked so much like Karen that I had to laugh. “Well, I guess she does look kind of dumb,” I admitted, “But that doesn't mean she isn't a good person. She's kind of fun. She likes to ride bikes with me.”

“Do you really think we look like sisters?” asked Lynne, smiling brightly into my face.

“Oh yes!” I exclaimed, “Let's pretend we're sisters. I always wanted a sister. You're my big sister.” Even though I was two months older than Lynne, this arrangement seemed appropriate.

The thought was so delightful to both of us that we slipped our arms around each others' waists and walked quickly in step down the sidewalk.

“Have you ever heard this?” Lynne asked and started chanting in time to our steps:

Left, Left, Left, Right, Left!
Left my wife, and for-ty-eight-children
Home alone without any gingerbread
Left, Left, Left, Right, Left!”

So we marched along oblivious to the chill wind until we decided to try another house.

“There's another creepy-looking house. Let's try it!” I said as I grabbed the box and scurried up the walk before Lynne could object. My hopeful knock was met by a low growl from behind the door. By the time Lynne reached the porch it was a menacing bark. A man opened the door a crack, woofed a loud “No!” to our query and slammed the door.

“Que Diablos!” exclaimed Lynne as we made a quick retreat.

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“It means, 'What a devil.' It's Spanish.”

“You speak Spanish too?” I marveled.

“We studied it in school last year. Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho, nueve, diez!” she counted quickly.

“Can you teach me?” I asked.

“Sure. I have my old book at home. Someday when you come over we'll study it. Here's a song we learned,” and she began to sing,

“La Cucaracha, La Cucaracha,
Ya no Quiere caminar,
Porque no tiene, Porque la falta,
Marihuana que fumar.”

She taught me the words line by line. We walked along, singing our song, passing the box of cards between us, stopping at a house now and then.

“Let's make up English words to the song,” I suggested. And this is what we came up with:

“La Cucaracha, La Cucaracha
Sisters, we are so very gay.
Where 'ere we go, Dear,
We'll always show, Dear,
Christmas and greeting cards so gay.”

At the last house we visited we discovered it was already after the time Lynne's dad was to pick her up at my house. So we hurried home laughing and singing all the way, with big drops of rain landing on our heads. But we kept our samples dry.

Her father was waiting impatiently for us when we arrived. Lynne took the responsibility for the card order. For some

strange reason the cards did not come until five days before Christmas. Lynne and her parents delivered most of them. I delivered to people who had ordered from just me, mostly people at the YWCA where Aunt Musa worked. I know we made a small profit, but the amount is lost in the fog of history. I was embarrassed that the orders came so late. I was surprised that no one expressed much exasperation with us. Perhaps our customers didn't expect too much from the Cucuracha Sisters on their first commercial venture.

Half-Orphans

It was the morning after Thanksgiving. I was drying dishes, trying to keep up with Aunt Musa, the fastest dish-washer in Illinois, when there came a knock at the back door.

It was Karen. She came into the middle of the kitchen and just stood there looking around at us all. Daddy was reading the paper in the living room. Jon was tinkering with a dead radio on the dining room table. Aunt Musa was vigorously scrubbing the bacon pan. I stood there with the dish towel inquisitively looking at Karen.

“My dad died last night,” she said in a quiet voice.

Everyone immediately stopped what they were doing and gathered around her.

“I’m so sorry,” said Daddy, and he put a comforting hand on Karen’s shoulder. “Please tell your mother if there is anything at all we can do, just let us know.”

“Geez! Poor kid,” said Jon and went back to his radio.

Aunt Musa made a strange sound in her throat, then “That’s tough!”

Karen looked bewildered by all the attention. After a moment Aunt Musa said, “You go on and take care of your friend, Dianne. Maybe you’d like to go for a walk.”

It was a sullen gray November day. We walked down Everts and turned west on Highwood Avenue, past the church and on down the hill. I cast sidelong glances at Karen and desperately

wished I could think of something consoling to say.

“I suppose you're going to miss him,” I tried lamely. Oh what a stupid thing to say. Of course she would miss him. I wondered if she would miss him as much as I still missed my mother. I still cried myself to sleep many nights. I still dreamed that same dream where I would see her off in the distance in a crowd in a strange land. I'd squeeze through all the people to get to where she was, but when I reached that spot, she was never there.

“I suppose most people are closer to their mother than their father 'cause their mother mostly takes care of them, usually,” I said.

“Yeah, I guess,” said Karen vaguely.

Karen didn't seem to want to talk. I didn't want to say more stupid things to make her feel worse than she already did so we walked along in silence. Even the houses seemed dismal today. They hardly had any lawns. They were so close together, each in the shadow of its neighbor. Even if the sun did shine this neighborhood would be dark and gloomy.

“When's the funeral?” I asked.

“Monday.”

“My mother was cremated.” I couldn't believe I said that. I'd never told anyone before.

“What's cremated?”

“That's when the body is burned instead of buried.”

“Oh. My dad will just be buried.”

“Do you suppose he's in heaven by now?” I asked.

“Don't know.”

On we walked, up one street and down the next with little thought to our direction. What does happen when you die, I wondered. Does your soul fly straight up to heaven? I had heard the Catholic kids talk about Purgatory. To me it sounded like a strange invention. And I was skeptical of Hell. If God was kind and loving like they said, surely He would never place anyone in a place of eternal fire and unbearable suffering. Daddy said Hell is probably a scare tactic to get people to behave. Perhaps the whole thing was a hoax. Perhaps when you die you're just plain dead, like a log in the forest.

What an discomfoting thought! Lynne had insisted the human spirit was a vibrant thing that must endure with or without the body. Vibrant! What a wonderful word! You could almost see it glow. That thought comforted me for a moment as I pictured my vibrant mother glowing up there next to God.

I had heard people say, “Only the good die young,” because God wanted them by his side. I knew He'd like my mother up there. She was kind and gentle and could sing as sweetly as any angel. It was easy to believe in heaven. Heaven must be a wonderful place. It would be full of light and love and kindness. The angels would be singing. There would be flowers and birds. Maybe it's not just for people but for all God's creatures. Maybe our old cat, Scotch, would be up there. Mommy would like that.

But what about Karen's father? Wasn't he good too?

I glanced at Karen. She had that absent minded "Karen-look". She might not be too swift in school, but she was a good person, and her mother was good and kind. Mrs. Poelman had been kind to me. Surely she wouldn't have married Mr. Poelman if he hadn't been a good person. Did he die because he was so good that God needed him in heaven?

Didn't Karen's family need him also? If God were kind and loving, how could He need Mr. Poelman so much more than his family needed him right here and now on earth? Couldn't He see how much they needed him? Couldn't He see how much we needed our Mommy? Didn't we pray hard enough? Did we not say the right words?

The whole thing was very unfair. Thoughts whirled round and round in my head. Perhaps God had no control of the things happening on earth. Maybe He didn't care! Maybe we were all characters in someone else's dream. Perhaps the earth and everyone in it were elements of God's dream and He was having a nightmare from which He couldn't wake up. Perhaps God didn't even exist!

What a scary thought! It made me feel cold and guilty. My belief in a loving God was simple and basic. It was born with the first prayer my mother taught me and nurtured by every meadow breeze and forest path I had known. I tried to push the dark thoughts away.

We found ourselves in front of the little store next to the Catholic Church. We went in. I fished in my pocket and found a dime. I bought an extra large Milky Way bar, and, back on the sidewalk, carefully divided it and shared it with Karen.

"Now we're both half-orphans." said Karen as she munched on

the candy. We soon were back to the corner of Highwood and Everts.

“There's something I've been wanting to ask you,” said Karen looking at me intently.

Oh good, I thought, now maybe we'll talk about something important, like what the funeral was like or stuff like that.

Karen stretched onto her tiptoes and brought her face quite close to mine. “Why do you have those bumps all over your face?”

“Well you see...” I began. I was going to tell her about having had poison ivy, and the bumps staying when the poison ivy was gone, and going to the doctor, and having to wash with tincture of green soap and witch hazel twice a day. But then I suddenly felt very self-conscious.

“Are they really that bad?” I asked.

Karen squinted and studied my face closely. “Naw, they're not that bad unless you get up real close. Gotta go. Thanks for the candy. See ya!” Then she was gone.

It was starting to drizzle. I stood there for a moment on the corner, watching her leave ... and feeling my face.



Our home in Highwood, Illinois

Mid-Winter Fun

George Harrison, the sailor, arrived two days after Christmas in a snow storm. I could hardly believe how cute he was. Ever since I came to live with Aunt Musa she had raved about the handsome George Harrison and what a darling couple he made with Joyce when they'd dance the tango at the Servicemen's Center. Joyce was a beautiful vivacious young woman, perfect figure, natural blonde hair, peaches and cream complexion, in the limelight wherever she went. Aunt Musa knew they were made for each other. Long before this time she had begun to write a novel about them. It was to be a great romance.

And here was George, back for a visit after two long years. I had thought anyone so famously handsome would be aloof, but he wasn't. Not a bit! He had an easy smile and a simple manner of speech that put me at ease immediately. He brought Jon and me presents, books. Mine was, *The House at Pooh Corner*, Jon's, *The Call of the Wild*. George had expected smaller children and thought my book might be too juvenile. But it wasn't. I read it right away.

"Lynne! I wish you could see him!" I exclaimed to my friend via the telephone. "He's just as cute as Aunt Musa said. He's tall and slim. He has friendly brown eyes and this gorgeous mass of dark brown curly hair. And he's really nice too!" I went on and on telling her every detail of his visit, that I had played cards with him and worked a picture puzzle with him, and at the Service Center, with Joyce right there in the same room, he had asked ME to play ping pong.

Lynne was interested in every detail of the story. She said he sounded like a Greek god. She wanted to come and see him but

had to stay home with Marcus. Then she wanted to know all about “the goddess,” her term for Joyce.

Well yes. Joyce had come to our apartment with several other young adults and George had driven her home. And yes, they had danced together at the Service Center on Saturday night. But no, they didn't dance really close. And yes, they both did dance with other partners. And no, Lynne did not suppose they'd be getting married too soon.

“I hope he'll wait about eight years,” I said wistfully.

“Oh you nut! Do you really think he'll wait for you to grow up?”

I blushed deeply into the telephone and wished I could take back my words. But Lynne quickly went on to other things. What book had he brought me? When I told her she laughed.

“That's a juvenile book!” she said. “I read it in second grade!”

The conversation ended there. Feeling deflated, I headed for the refrigerator and found half of one of Aunt Musa's chiffon cakes. I cut myself a generous slice. Aunt Musa had been on a chiffon cake binge, making five in the past month. The top of each one was light and fluffy, but the bottom inch had the consistency of rubber. Kate said it was because Aunt Musa substituted melted crisco for salad oil. Aunt Musa didn't mind. She just kept making it that way. I didn't mind. I ate it anyway.

As I ate I ruminated on the day's possibilities. Karen was away at her uncle's. I had thought I might walk the three miles through the snow over to Lynne's house. I didn't feel like doing that anymore. Lynne's just too highfaluting to appreciate those

charming little Pooh characters I thought and piled onto my bed to finish the remaining pages of my new book.

Soon there was a knock at the door and it was Karen, back early from her uncle's.

"Oh Karen!" I cried excitedly. "I'm reading the best book! It's about these cute little animals that aren't dumb at all, even though Pooh is supposed to be a bear of 'very little brain.' " And then I read her the part about Pooh and Piglet and the Heffalump. Pooh and Piglet have fallen into a deep hole in the forest and they imagine it's a Heffalump trap for Poohs. Pooh and Piglet are plotting what they shall do when the Heffalump returns. Tiny Piglet imagines himself the hero of the encounter.

Karen listened intently with a slight smile as she sat stroking the cat. When I finished she wanted to hear it again, so we read it together with her reading Piglet's part with a high squeaky voice, and me reading the scary Heffalump in a deep loud voice.

"Oh Karen! We're so good we could be in the movies!"

We tried it again and this time Karen crouched down pretending to be very very small and she really hammed up her lines.

Just then Jon stomped into the kitchen. "What are you two idiots doing?"

I rushed at him with Karen's long blue scarf draped over my head. "I'm a huge hairy Heffalump and I'm going to eat you up! Grrrr!" I hollered with a fierce face and claw-like hands.

"And I'm brave tiny Piglet that catches Heffalumps and I can

catch you too!” squeaked Karen as she hopped toward Jon in a crouched position.

“I always thought you two were nuts. Now I know!” snickered Jon as he danced around the room pretending to be frightened.

We two girls giggled and squeaked and grrred a few more times then Jon said, “Hey Dinkle, remember that movie I told you about, 'The Five Thousand Fingers of Dr. T'?”

I HATED it when he called me that. “Dinkle” was a name only my father was to use. On the other hand, I did want to hear about the movie, so I masked my anger. “Yeah?”

“It's playing at the Highwood theater. Do you want to go tonight?”

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” I was quite excited. “Can Karen come too?”

“I guess so. If she's not afraid of the rats,” said Jon.

“Rats!” we both squealed in horror.

“Yup, they have rats in that old crumbly theater, big old black ones that creep under the seats.” He made a scary face and hunched up his shoulders like a beady-eyed rat about to pounce, while Karen and I cowered together in horror. “They won't bite you though, as long as you keep your feet up on the seat.”

“He's just teasing,” I said doubtfully.

“Really, I even saw one once. You decide if you're brave enough to come,” and he disappeared into his room with a chuckle.

“How come he's in a good mood? I thought he was always mean,” Karen commented when Jon had gone.

“Well he is mostly,” I agreed. “He went to see his girlfriend, Genora, at Ft. Sheridan this morning. Maybe she was really sweet to him.”

“Let's go ask my mom if I can go.”

“You mean you're not too scared?”

Karen had to consider. “Well--not too.”

Outside was a fairy wonderland of white. Long icicles like diamond daggers hung from the roofs. When we reached the Methodist church on the corner we found the pastor's two small children playing in the churchyard. We helped them build a snowman. They laughed delightedly until their mother came to the door and called them in for lunch.

“Have you ever noticed her eyes,” I asked Karen, “You know, Mrs. Sample's?”

“Huh?”

“One is blue and one is brown. Do you ever go there?”

“Once in awhile. She's nice.”

“Yeah, SHE'S nice, but did you ever go to the youth group? Some of those kids are so mean. I don't know why they go to church. They don't seem to get what it's all about.”

“What happened?”

Then I related a disturbing incident in which I ended up being called a fatso that sat around and read the Bible all the time, just because I was the only one who knew the answer to a question the pastor posed.

Karen was sympathetic. She thought they probably needed to go to church the most. If they were already good they wouldn't need it so much. "And besides," she continued, "My mom says there are lots of good people there. Shh! Don't tell anybody this, but they bought my mother her sewing machine. Aw Dang! I wasn't sposed to tell!" And then, as if the inner turmoil were too much to handle, she reverted to her Piglet character and went hopping and squeaking down the street.

Boing! Boing Boing! "Hey everybody! I'm Piglet! I'm going to Pooh's house to escape the horrible Heffalump!"

I looked around to see if anyone was watching. Fortunately no one was. She was now half a block ahead. "Hey Karen!" I hollered, "You're supposed to be a tiny little piglet, not a kangaroo!"

Boing! Boing! Boing! She was right in front of the neighborhood grocery when an old man stepped out of the door with his arms full of groceries.

Boing! Boing! Boing!

"Karen! Watch out!" I yelled, not quite soon enough to avert disaster.

"Mama Mia! What's-a going on-a-here. It's not-a-safe to walk-a-da street no more!" The old man sat there on the sidewalk with his groceries rolling everywhere.

Karen stood up straight and stared at him, dumbfounded. I wanted to disappear. I didn't really know this girl. I wasn't too far past the corner. Maybe I could still duck around it and pretend I wasn't there. But before I could do it Karen looked at me with, "HELP!" in her eyes as the man keep hollering in broken English and Italian. There was really nothing to be done but meekly help my friend get the old man to his feet. He had landed gently on his bottom and, thanks to his heavy coat, did not appear to be damaged. We gathered up his groceries which also looked unharmed, and left the scene of the crime quickly and quietly.

Mrs. Poelman agreed to let Karen go to the movie since she had money and a chaperone. Karen had saved a dollar from her Christmas stocking, and Mrs. Poelman was certain I'd take good care of her daughter. Gee, I was flattered. She also assured us that the city health department would close the theater down if it really had rats.

That night was crystal clear and cold. As we three walked home we talked about the movie. Jon thought it was a little boy's nightmare, having to play a mile long piano for a wicked teacher. I thought it would be delightful to have such a long piano to play. Karen just liked it. There were no rats, but Karen had sat the entire evening with her feet tucked up under her, just in case.

And George Harrison, the living doll, the Greek god, the sweet and charming sailor, concluded his visit and returned to Virginia, promising to return when circumstances would allow. I never saw him again.

The Irish Jig

“That’s the first time I ever cheated,” I confided gloomily to Lynne as I came out of the geography room.

“Do you feel guilty?” asked Lynne inquisitively.

I had missed school the previous day and missed the big geography test on India. I hadn't been very sick. In fact, I hadn't been sick at all. There had been two big parties at the Y and Aunt Musa had let me play hookey and help set up for them. In all the commotion I did not have a moment's time to study. I spoke with Lynne on the phone that evening and heard how difficult the test had been. Panic overtook me. I realized I knew nothing about India. I was used to getting A's on everything. Lynne was understanding. She, too, realized how once you had achieved the prestige of being an A student, it was very important to continue the tradition. After some discussion we concluded the simplest solution was for her to give me, over the phone, a list of all the answers. All I had to do was to memorize the twenty one-word answers. How beautifully simple. I spent the rest of the evening folding chairs, eating cake, and memorizing – 1) Ganges, 2) Ceylon, 3) Brahmaputra, etc.

Now the make-up exam was over.

“If you thought it was wrong, why did you do it? Besides, who will know,” said Lynne.

“I know, and probably the teacher does too, and I feel very stupid,” I said.

“What happened?”

“What would you think if you asked 'What's the largest city in India,' and the kid said cinnamon?” I replied.

“Dianne! How could you be so dumb! Cinnamon was the answer to number 11. The largest city in India is number 12. That's Calcutta, not cinnamon!” Lynne thought the whole thing was hysterical.

“She left one out!” I said indignantly.

“Now she probably knows you cheated. Did she say anything?”

“She asked me how I could have written that down and I said I got mixed up because I still wasn't feeling totally well,” I explained.

“Aha! You not only cheated, you lied too! Tsch, Tsch Tsch!” chortled Lynne. She was enjoying the situation much more than I.

I sank into silence as we walked down the stairs to the gym. I pondered what might have happened if I had told Mrs. Wirtz the truth. She would have given me an 'F' and then she would have told all the other teachers that Dianne Zimmerman had cheated, and then Mr. Waller would be watching me all the time to see when I was going to cheat in his class and he would never smile or joke with me ever again. Horrors! It seemed obvious that once I decided to cheat I had to lie about it.

Gym class that day was the final rehearsal for the Irish jig we sixth grade girls were to dance that evening in the school talent show. We'd been practicing for a month. Right-cross-right-kick! Left-cross-left-kick! to the tune of “The Irish Washerwoman.” It

was fun. The music and activity began to numb my feelings of guilt and shame.

“Be here at seven sharp with your costumes!” the teacher reminded at the end of class.

After school I rushed home to try on my costume. What an ordeal that had been. The day the program was announced the teacher had given us a pattern number. She told us the types and amounts of material we'd need, and at what store to buy it. Then she assured us if we couldn't afford new costumes we could improvise and that would be fine too. The finished costume was a short green skirt, a white blouse, a black cummerbund, a red vest, and white or green knee socks. That evening I had told Aunt Musa about the costume. She said, “Humph!” and then went on about how unreasonable it was to expect working people to come up with that kind of money for a costume that would only be worn once, and five dollars was hard to come by and would feed the whole lot of us for several days, and she didn't have a sewing machine nor any time to be sewing if she did have one. I was afraid that's what she would say. At that point Linda Sue, our cat, had jumped onto the table and spilled the milk remaining from supper. The costume subject was never mentioned again, not with Aunt Musa anyway.

The next day I had asked around class. Everyone would have a made costume except one other girl whose parents also thought it was too expensive. They'd come up with something. But what was I to do?

That afternoon Karen had come home with me after school to help me figure it out. I searched through boxes in the basement and found an old green skirt someone at the Y had given me. It had been too big then but now it was about right. Of course it

was much too long, but I could take up the hem. I knew I had a red sweater somewhere that might work for the vest. Karen found it under my bed. It had a hole in the front of it, but I could fix that. I remembered having a wide black belt. Karen assured me the place to look for a belt was on the closet floor at the very back, and sure enough, there it was. And while scrounging for the belt I found a white blouse I hadn't remembered at all. It was quite roomy, not at all tight like the ones I usually wore. I tried on everything at once. Karen declared the total effect quite satisfactory, except for the socks, which she thought she could help me out with, explaining that her socks were VERY stretchy. I breathed a huge sigh of relief.

So the final hour was now drawing near. I had mended the sweater and shortened the skirt. I tried on all the parts together. It felt OK.

Right-cross-right-kick. Left-cross-left-kick. I practiced my steps across the living room. I wondered how it looked so I climbed up onto my bed and examined the reflection in my dresser mirror.

No, no! It wouldn't do at all. It was still much too long. The skirt had a rather wide hem. I folded it over once and then again and held it against my leg. Yes, that looked better. Quickly I stitched in the new hem. I was trying it on again when Karen arrived.

“Oh Karen! I'm so glad you're here. You can tell me how my costume looks. Is yours ready?”

“I think so,” Karen answered vaguely.

“Well what do you think?” I asked as I turned slowly in a circle, and then did several of the steps.

“Hmmm,” mused Karen thoughtfully. “When you kick I can see your underpants.”

I climbed back on the bed and did a few kicks. Not only could I see my underpants, there was a hole in them!

I collapsed on the bed in despair. “Oh Karen! Whatever shall I do? I've worked and worked on this dumb costume and now the skirt's too short!”

Karen seemed to grasp the gravity of the situation. She gazed at me for a moment and then said, “Let's go ask my mom. She'll know what to do.”

“Oh but Karen! I hate to bother your mother. She has so much work to do. And look at the clock! It's almost 4:30! We're supposed to be there at 7:00!”

“That's OK. She won't mind. C'mon!” she said pulling me toward the door.

So I changed my clothes again and we took the skirt to Karen's mother, who didn't seem to mind the intrusion. I modeled the skirt for her and she agreed it was too short. She glanced at her watch and said she thought there'd still be time to fix it.

At dinner that night I asked if anyone wanted to come to my talent show but everyone had other plans. As I was about to go out the door in all of my costume except a different skirt, Aunt Musa said, “Hey! Where did you get that blouse?” I explained I had found it on the closet floor and it wasn't tight at all.

“I'll say it's not tight. It's practically falling off of you. That's

my blouse! I wondered where it was.” Aunt Musa and I shared a bedroom and a closet.

I stood there feeling bewildered.

Aunt Musa chuckled. “I guess you can wear it tonight. Actually, it doesn't look too bad. Is this get-up for that Irish program you were talking about a while back?”

“Well, yes. Except for the skirt. I found an old green one in the basement and I got it too short so Mrs. Poelman is trying to fix it.”

“Oh!” Aunt Musa gave me a puzzled look. She seemed about to say something else, but turned abruptly and began clearing the supper table.

Karen's mother had the skirt all finished when I arrived at her house. I slipped into it. Yes, it seemed a much better length.

“Aren't you coming to the program?” I asked Mrs. Poelman as Karen and I were about to leave.

“No,” she replied, “I promised these clothes to Mrs. Goodwin by tonight and they're not quite done. You girls run along and have fun. I'm sure you'll dance beautifully. David's already gone.”

We got to school and slipped into our seats in the crowded gym just in time. Lynne was right in front of me. She turned around and whispered, “You look nice!” with a big smile. I looked around at the rest of my class. Even the one other girl whose parents could not afford the official costume had one that looked nearly identical. Oh well, I sighed to myself. I had done the best I could and Lynne said I looked nice so I sat back to enjoy the program. When it was time for the fourth graders to perform,

they sang *Funiculi, Funicula*. David and the kid next to him were in the back row grinning and poking each other the whole time.

Finally it was our turn. We made a line facing the audience and waited for the music to begin. Who was there? Lynne's parents were there. Mr. Waller had been in the front row with the sixth grade boys but now he was gone. Suddenly the music started.

Right-cross-right-kick! Left-cross-left-kick! We proceeded through all six parts and were doing beautifully. During the last chorus I noticed two boys from my class sitting four rows back and directly in front of me. They were snickering and pointing right at me. "See her pants!" I thought I heard one of them say. I could feel my face getting very hot as we took our bow and then our seats. I was so mortified I didn't notice what the seventh and eighth graders did. I sat there fingering the hem of my skirt trying to figure something else the kid could have said.. Perhaps he had said, "See her dance!" Dance-pants, Pants-dance. That had to be it. Mrs. Poelman would not have left my skirt too short. She was a professional. Wasn't she? I was trying so hard to think positive.

I filed out of the room with the others as the program ended. There by the doorway stood Mr. Waller!

"Hey! You gals danced real classy!" he drawled giving me a pat on the shoulder as we walked by. My heart did a little flip and my smile returned.

Then Lynne came brushing past with her parents. "See ya tomorrow and don't forget to study geography!" she teased. "Toodle-oo!"

I found myself walking out into the night with Karen and

Priscilla, another girl in our class who lived nearby. Priscilla was a pretty girl with black curly hair and big blue eyes. She and Karen had been friends for several years. I sometimes played with her when Karen was busy. She was the youngest of a number of children and had several married siblings living in her spacious home. Priscilla was vivacious and good-humored, though Lynne and I considered her childish.

“It went well,” she chattered as we walked into the warm February night. In fact it was so warm that snow was melting and running in streams down the edges of the road. Priscilla always had pretty clothes that filled me with envy. Tonight she had on a filmy aqua scarf and a tweed coat with a brown fur collar which she wore with a sophisticated unbuttoned look. I started to unbutton mine to copy the effect, but stopped when I remembered my short skirt.

Priscilla was babbling on about the dance. “We danced so beautifully. Guess who came up to me afterward and said he liked our dance. You’ll never guess!”

I thought of the snickering boys. “I’ll bet it was either Billy or Joe,” I said glumly.

“Oh how did you guess! It was Joe. Isn’t he a doll?”

“Yeah, sure,” I answered. “Did you hear what he said while we were dancing?”

“Oh he probably said, ‘What beauties! What sweet colleens!’” her dramatics made me giggle.

“I thought he said something about beer cans,” said Karen dryly.

“Right!” I added, “He said, ‘Give me beer cans.’”

“Right!” said Priscilla, “He said, I wish I had some old beer cans to throw at you!”

During this conversation we had moved further and further into the middle of the road to avoid the streams of water.

Fortunately, we were on a side road with no traffic. Suddenly Priscilla grabbed us both by an arm and said, “Let's pretend we're drunk!”

“Oh give me a beer!” she sang out.

“For I do fear,”

“That I shall die,” she continued.

“Of being dry!” Karen chimed in.

“Hic!” I added as I leaned into Priscilla. Soon all three of us were singing the new song and hiccuping and swaying down the road. Then one of us started the Irish jig step and we did the whole Irish jig to the new tune of “Give Me a Beer.” I don't think I had ever acted this crazy before. At the time I didn't know the definition of the word stress. Looking back I can see that indeed it had been a stressful day. And acting crazy in the middle of the road with two friends on a warm February night felt really good.

Until ...

Suddenly there was a squeal of brakes. We dashed into a driveway and sobered up. “What are you idiots doing!” an angry face yelled at us. “Are you trying to keep the hospitals full? You get on home now or I'll have the police out looking for you! Dumb girls!” And off he went with a loud roar of the engine.

We looked at one another with chagrin until Priscilla broke the silence, “That face was familiar. Where have I seen him before?”

“I don't know but let's get home before the police come,” I said.

“He won't call the police,” said Karen. “He's probably just--just--constipated!”

“Yeah, right!” enthused Priscilla, “He was in a hurry to get home to the bathroom and we slowed him down!”

Though we all laughed at that, we were now more subdued and walked sedately down the sidewalk to Priscilla's house.

“I remember where I saw him!” she exclaimed just before she went in the door, “It was last summer at Lincoln Park Zoo. He was in the cage with all the other apes!” We bid her good-bye with a final round of laughter.

“Gee, that was fun,” sighed Karen.

I eyed her jealously. “She's okay. But have you ever played at her house? All she ever wants to do is play school or store.”

“School and store can be fun to play,” argued Karen.

“Once in awhile is okay. But really, Karen, how many times can you sell your hairbrush for a play dollar and find it exciting?” Inwardly, I had to admit Priscilla seemed to have gotten a bit brighter since the last time I'd played Store with her. But I sure didn't want Karen to think so. Karen was My friend now, not Priscillas! Gee, I thought suddenly. Could that be how Karen feels when I hang around with Lynne in school? Or how Lynne

feels when I tell her about all the fun stuff Karen and I do out of school?

Out of the blue Karen asked, “Did you cheat on that geography test you had to make up?”

“How did you know about that?!”

“Just a hunch,” said Karen with a sly smile and I knew she had overheard Lynne and me talking.

“Oh! Karen! It was a dreadful thing to do. I'm so embarrassed. You must never tell anyone! Promise?”

There was such an urgency in my voice that Karen promised and I went on to tell her the whole story and what Lynne had said about me, both cheating and lying.

“Actually, if Lynne gave you the answers, she was cheating too,” was Karen's opinion of the whole episode. I had not thought of that angle and felt renewed warmth toward my friend for her consolation.

“Have you ever cheated?” I asked.

“Nope,” she replied, “If I ever got a hundred, they'd know I cheated.”

“Karen! You're not That dumb!” I assured her as we arrived at Karen's corner and parted company.

Green Door

"Green door, what's that secret you're keepin?"

The words to the popular song floated out of the open bar room door as Karen and I peered into the smoky darkness.

"Have you ever been in a tavern?" I asked in a whisper.

"Sure. A couple of times. When I was little. Have you?" Karen whispered back.

"Yes! Just last Thursday! Daddy took Kate and me and another lady to My Favorite Inn for supper. It was nice. Not like this place. This is just a plain old bar."

"Which is your favorite inn?" asked Karen soberly.

"My Favorite Inn is the name of the tavern!" I said with exasperation. "You know that!" Karen giggled. Several curious patrons had begun to stare at us so we moved away from the door and continued down the street.

"Anyway, they're both among the thirty-six," I said. The balmy March weather had pulled Karen and me right out of our houses after dinner. We decided it was a perfect night to try to locate all thirty-six Highwood taverns. We were up to five.

"Does your mom mind your going for a walk like this after dinner?" I asked.

"Of course not!" replied Karen, "I told her I was going to see you. She never worries about me when I'm with you."

"Why's that?"

"She thinks you're a nice kid with a good brain. She'd rather have me hanging around with you than some juvenile delinquent. She's always afraid David and I are going to find juvenile delinquents to hang out with. Can't you just see me hanging out on the corner drinking and smoking?" Then she pulled her collar up and took a pretend puff of a pretend cigarette and a pretend swig from a pretend bottle. I cracked up. Karen could be a riot.

"You dimwit!" I exclaimed. "Someone's going to call the police and haul us into jail for drunken walking!"

Just then a drunken soldier stumbled out of tavern number six and began staggering in earnest down the sidewalk in front of us. Karen followed along behind aping his every move.

I grabbed her arm. "Stop it, dope! They will think we ARE juvenile delinquents! And look! There's a police car right there!"

Karen glanced at the police car and became very sedate. Then she saw the policeman in the car and stopped in her tracks. "That's the one!" she exclaimed. Her whole manner had changed as she stared at the police car.

"Karen?" I began.

"That's the policeman that came to our house last night."

"What on earth happened?" I asked.

"Last night a drunk came into our apartment."

“You're kidding!”

“No, really. It was awful! You know, anyone can come in that green door at the bottom of the stairs. So this guy--and he was really ugly--he had stringy gray hair, and a big red nose, and a great big belly. His shirt didn't even cover it all the way.” Karen shivered involuntarily. “Mom was up sewing. David and I were in bed, only I was just half asleep. I heard this loud singing, 'O sole mio!' I mean, I can usually hear some noise from the bar but this was really loud so I got up and came out into the living room and Mom was just standing there looking at the door and looking real scared, cause you know, that lock on the upstairs door never did work too well. And then we heard him start hollering, 'Are there any cute ladies up here?' in this horrid soupy voice. And then he started banging on the door and Mom was really scared. So she went over to the door and said in a quiet voice, 'Leave at once or I will call the police. There are children asleep in here.' She didn't even know I was up. And then he started turning the knob and rattling the door and Mom leaned up against it, and all the while this guy was saying all this horrid stuff about how he wanted my mom to be his sweet little love bird and all this sick stuff. And then Mom saw me and she said, 'Karen, call the police.' So I went and called the police, cause Mom always has their number right next to the phone in case something like this happens.”

“And what did you say?” I asked

“I told them where we lived and that this guy was trying to break into our apartment and they said they'd be right over. And so when I got back he had pushed the door open and I could see how ugly he was. And it just happened there was a broom standing there in the corner cause I had forgotten to put it away. So Mom grabbed the broom and this guy was trying to grab my

mother. He was calling her his 'frisky little pet.' He was so drunk, I don't think he could have caught her anyway, but she started hitting him with the broom and I thought he was going to fall backwards down the stairs and kill himself, but he didn't. He just held his hands over his head and said, 'Sorry Lady!' and started backing down the stairs. Then the police came.”

“And then?” I prodded.

“Then one policeman hauled the drunk away and that other one over there, he came up and asked a lot of questions, but Mom made me go to bed. And you know, David slept through the whole thing! And Mom said not to tell him. She doesn't want him to be scared and have nightmares.”

“Well how about you? Will you be scared and have nightmares?”

“Nope.”

“How come?”

“Cause this morning Mom went out and bought a dead bolt lock and put it on. She says next time they'll have to break the door down, and anyone drunk enough to try wouldn't have the strength.”

“Goll Karen, I'd have been scared silly. I'm always scared anyway when I'm home all alone. I hear creaks and groans and I guess it's just the house or the people upstairs, but sometimes I get so scared I climb into bed and put the pillow over my head.”

“Yeah and you've even got Linda Sue to protect you! Mom says we might have to move. She says this isn't a very good place to

raise children and she was always afraid something like this would happen.”

“Please, don't move!” I felt like I'd just been stabbed. I loved going adventuring with Karen.

“I know,” said Karen and we both looked at the ground and walked on quietly. We had passed a whole parcel of taverns we forgot to count and were walking along Sheridan Road next to the fence enclosing Fort Sheridan.

“I'll bet your mom misses your Dad,” I ventured after a bit.

“Yeah, I know. At first nobody talked about him at all. But last weekend Dad's sister came to visit and they got started about the old days when he and mom were dating and things that happened when we were little. She wants David and me to remember the good times we used to have.” Then she went on to share some of her memories of her father. I was amazed. I hadn't known Karen had so many words in her as I was hearing. Then I told her about how badly we had all missed my mommy after she died and how my dad couldn't sleep at night and how he'd get me up and teach me how to play chess in the middle of the night.

“Do you think he'll ever get married again?” asked Karen as she glanced up and wrinkled her nose.

“Oh no!” I replied emphatically. “He could never love anyone enough to marry them after our mother!”

“What about Kate?”

“She's a very nice lady, but it's not like he's in love with her or anything. She's just a good friend of our whole family.”

After a few moments Karen said in a low voice, "Wouldn't it be funny if your dad married my mother?"

I hadn't thought of that before. I turned it over in my mind for a minute and said, "Then we'd be sisters!"

"Right! And you'd have to have David as a brother!"

"And you, poor thing, you'd have to have Jon!" I added.

"He can be rather nice at times. Remember when he took us to the movie?"

"Yeah," I admitted, "sometimes he's okay, it's just most of the time that bugs me!"

"If I were your sister he wouldn't dare pick on you," Karen declared. "I'd pulverize him!" Karen swung a right, then a left into an imaginary brother Jon. She danced around and ducked to avoid his counter blows. Then she tripped him and jumped up and down on him. "There, that'll fix him," she declared.

"That's a good little sister!" I laughed, giving her an affectionate pat.

By this time we were way down Sheridan Road near the main entrance to the Fort. "Gosh Karen! We walked all this way and forgot to count. I think we were at six when you started to copy that drunk and I was afraid the police would stop us. Oh no! I shouldn't have said that. I'll get you started again!"

"Naw. I don't feel drunk anymore," she said with a giggle.

“Maybe we should go home,” I suggested as we stopped by the entrance road leading up to the main gate. That road ran up several hundred yards before it came to the guard house. We could clearly see the two MPs on duty in the bright light. The air was no longer balmy. In fact we were starting to feel cold. We were about to turn around and start home when a car pulled up next to us. We watched a young man climb out of the car and walk toward us.

“Hi girls!” he said with a smiley voice. “Would you gals like to ride to Chicago with us?”

I returned his smile, but grabbed Karen's arm and walked quickly toward the MPs.

“Well would you?” the young man asked insistently, as he followed us up the road.

“No!” I shouted over my shoulder. I was starting to feel afraid.

“Do you live here or something?” he asked.

“Yes! And that's my Dad on duty up there!” yelled Karen. By then we were running.

We heard the fellow turn and walk back and get into his car. But we kept on toward the guard house until we heard the squeal of tires as he turned and sped off down Sheridan Road towards Chicago.

“Are you girls having a problem?” one of the MPs called out to us.

“No!” yelled Karen. We turned and began walking back towards town.

“You know Karen, we really shouldn't be out here in the dark like this with all these drunks wandering around. It isn't safe.” It had been great fun, but that guy trying to pick us up was scary. “You'd better not tell your Mom about this. She'll never let you go with me again.”

“But it was fun,” Karen sighed.

“Yeah sure! you probably would have gotten into the car with that guy if I hadn't been here,” I said.

“I would not have!” Karen answered stoutly. Then she added, “But it might have been fun to go to Chicago.”

“Karen! Hasn't your mother ever told you not to get into a car with strangers?”

“Nope! She only told me not to take candy from them.”

We soon found ourselves back at the edge of town across from the Dairy Queen. A car came towards us and slowed down then pulled up to the curb and stopped.

“Oh no!” Karen exclaimed. “Not again! Did you know we were this cute?”

“It's OK. It's just Pete, one of Aunt Musa's sailors.”

“Get in!” ordered Pete. “Your aunt's been tearing her hair out with worry. She sent me out to find you. I've looked in every tavern in town!”

“All thirty-six?” asked Karen brightly.

I gave her a look that said, “Silence!” as we slid into the back seat.

“Did you really think we'd be in a tavern?” I asked incredulously.

“Well I had to start somewhere,” he explained as he wheeled the car around and took off down the street towards Karen's house.

“He drives like he did more in the tavern than look for us,” whispered Karen.

“Quiet!” I whispered back.

We dropped Karen off at her green door and were soon back at my house. Aunt Musa chastised me sternly for running off without telling anyone where I was going. A big girl like me ought to know better than to wander the streets of Highwood at night.

Then she gave me a piece of chiffon cake and a glass of milk and asked me to fill in at the bridge table. I wondered silently if she would have sent Pete out looking for me if she hadn't needed a fourth for bridge.

SKOKIE HWY



Big Old Dead Tree

muck
and
mud



Hospital



Highland Park

Prairie Ave

Big Hill



Oak
Terr
Scho



Diann's
House



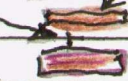
Event

Grocery
Store



tunnel under tracks

northbound
platform



Northwestern RR

NW station



Rose
Garden



Library

YWCA

Laurel Ave

Rich
People
Houses



Tavern



Lake Mich



Brains

“Just put your nose in the air! Isn't that a beautiful fragrance?”

It was a particularly warm day in March. That last trace of snow was gone. I had gotten in the habit of rushing through lunch and racing back to school so I could spend the rest of the lunch hour with Lynne, strolling around the playground, arm in arm, just talking about, Oh! so many things. Today it was the sweet smell of the earth. I stuck my nose up agreeably and sniffed.

“Do you know what that heavenly smell is?” asked Lynne.

“Well I guess it's the dirt,” I replied.

“Oh no, not the dirt!” chortled Lynne. “That, my friend, is the smell of the earth waking up after its long winter sleep. It's the rich aroma of the promise of new life. You can only smell it in the very early spring. Does it bring back any special memories for you?”

Yes, it did. I shared how it reminded me of sitting in the rose garden behind the Highland Park library before any of the flowers were up. Lynne shared a memory of a special day when she visited the woods on her uncle's farm. “When I close my eyes and take a deep breath it feels like I'm really back there,” she said. And, of course, I followed suit and had a similar experience.

“Say! How are all your cute little soldiers and sailors?” asked Lynne, changing the topic.

“They're not MINE,” I grinned.

“Well partly yours.”

“Actually, I haven't been down to the Service Center much lately. We've been kind of busy on weekends. We usually do stuff with Kate.”

“I see!” said Lynne with a knowing smile. “I told you you'd better watch those two.”

For once I didn't deny the implication. “When Aunt Musa's gone to the Service Center, Kate comes over and makes supper for us and we do stuff. Sometimes she brings her portable sewing machine and we sew, sometimes we go for car rides, sometimes we go to a movie. It's always fun. Kate makes everything seem fun.”

“And are you always with them?”

“No, not always. But she likes me to be with her. She likes me and you know what? She even likes Jon!”

“You ought to let them have some time alone, you know. Or else, how can he ever ask her?”

“Ask her what?”

“To marry him, of course!”

I wrinkled my nose. Why did the idea make me feel so funny inside? I loved Kate dearly. My happiest times were with her. I told her everything that happened to me. And yet, the idea of Daddy actually getting married again troubled me.

“I think he already did,” I finally answered.

“And what did she say?” asked Lynne with hushed excitement.

“I don't know what she said.” I was not at all sure I wanted to tell what I did know. But Lynne kept prodding and of course the whole story came out.

“The other night we were in the car, just Daddy and me, and he said to me, 'What would you think if Kate and I got married?' That's all.”

“And what did you say?” Lynne was much more excited about this prospect than I was.

“I didn't say anything. I just got this funny feeling in my tummy and I started to cry. I don't know why. I really like Kate and everything. I guess I want them to get married. I don't know why I cried and couldn't say anything. My dad probably thinks I'm an idiot. It just made me feel so funny when he asked me that question.”

Lynne looked at me deeply with a kind thoughtful expression. “I think it's because you loved your mother so much. You love Kate too, but it's not the same. Maybe you feel like you would be disloyal to your mother if you wanted your dad to marry someone else.”

“It just seems like right now everything is fine. I don't want anything to change. And then there is Aunt Musa. She's worked so hard taking care of us. If Daddy marries Kate, Aunt Musa will have to go back and live at the Y again.” Then I added, “Maybe she'd like that better.” I'd never thought of that before.

It felt good to have a friend I could talk to about important stuff.

I was glad I told her. Perhaps I was afraid of feeling disloyal. “I wish we could get together more outside of school.”

“Well, Dianne! The reason we can't is that you're always playing with Karen!” There was more than a hint of jealousy in her voice.

“I play with Karen because she's close. And besides, she's fun. If you weren't so prejudiced we could both come over to your house and have lots of fun. But you're always saying how dumb she is!”

“Well, I admit I've offered that opinion in the past. Lately I've been thinking perhaps she just pretends to be dumb so no one will expect much of her. Actually I've decided she's a stoic.”

“A what?”

“Stoic. S-T-O-I-C. It's Greek. You'll have to look it up. There's the bell!”

We went in to Social Studies with Mr. Waller, the best hour of the day. Mr. Waller wasn't there yet.

I looked up “stoic” with Lynne watching over my shoulder. “One who is unaffected by passion or feeling, manifesting indifference to pleasure or pain,” said the dictionary.

Just then Karen walked into the room with her usual vague, absent-minded expression, and Lynne and I both erupted in giggles. “Stoic, perhaps,” I said, “But that's only part of her.”

“Yeah, the other part is spelled D-U-M-B,” whispered Lynne.

Mr. Waller arrived even later than Karen that day, with a good-

natured smile and a small vase of blue flowers. “They're squills,” he explained, “the first flowers of spring.”

“Ooo !” “Ahhhh!” “They look like little bells!” exclaimed various class members.

“Wedding Bells!” whispered Lynne. “Mr. Waller's in love!” When a look of horror crept over my face she added, “Don't take it so hard. It was just a guess.”

Then he threw open the classroom windows and proceeded to talk about the wildflowers that would soon be blooming in the woods. Lynne just rolled her eyes.

The rest of the class period was spent working on our individual reports that were due soon. Lynne's report was on Greek gods. She had already written 15 pages and had traced many illustrations from books. Mine was on France. I had written a number of pages on various topics such as Paris, the Louvre, geography. Mostly I had copied word for word out of an encyclopedia. What did I know about plagiarism! I had also drawn a great map and was working prodigiously on a drawing of the Eiffel Tower for the cover. I wanted mine to be as good as Lynne's but I was not nearly up to fifteen pages.

“What's Karen's report on?” whispered Lynne.

Karen was staring blankly at the wall with a pencil stuck in the corner of her mouth.

That afternoon Karen and I walked to the Highland Park library. Highwood had no library of its own.

Soon we fell into step chanting the gingerbread ditty Lynne had taught me. We frequently sang as we walked along the

sidewalks We sang all the camp songs which I had already taught to Karen. Then I was surprised to have her teach me a song. It went like this:

“I know a weeny man.
He owns a weeny stand.
He sells me everything
From hot dogs on down.

Someday I'll marry him.
I'll be his weeny wife.
Hot Dog! I love that weeny man!”

Then I asked her if she thought Mr. Waller was in love. She just giggled.

At the library we each went about our own business. I found some books on France and a Gladys Malvern I hadn't read. When I looked for Karen I was amazed to find her engrossed in an encyclopedia, busily taking notes.

Karen looked up blankly and continued writing.

“Gosh Karen, you're taking this seriously, aren't you!” I said incredulously.

“Do you have any idea how much the sun weighs?” she replied.

“Well, no.”

“It weighs 2 billion, billion, billion tons. Do you have any idea what a number like that looks like? It's a two with 27 zeros after it. Look, it takes up a whole line of my paper if I write small. And it gets to be 25 million degrees in the middle. And it looks round and smooth but it has all sorts of eruptions and explosions

going on all the time. Sometimes they go a million miles out into space. Look, here are some drawings I made. This is called a loop prominence. See how nice and smooth the curves are? And this," here she pulled out a brightly colored drawing in shades of yellow, orange and red. "This is going to be my cover. It shows what you would find if you took a big slice out of it. And here's the core.... She went on and on using words like hydrogen and helium, magnetism and nuclear reaction. "What's the matter? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Now I was the one to look dumb. "Goll Karen!" I said finally, "I didn't know you were doing all this work. And those drawings... they're beautiful! I didn't know you could draw. And this isn't even due until next week "

"Geesh! You sound like you think I'm stupid or something. You and Lynne aren't the only ones who can do smart stuff." Karen grinned impishly and I could tell she was proud of herself.

"Mr. Waller's really going to be proud of you. Especially if you hand it in on time."

I wanted to show Karen some special places from my Highland Park days as long as we were here. I led her through an opening in the trees behind the library. It was the Rose Garden, now brown and still in the March air. But it smelled wonderful. "Just put your nose in the air! Isn't that a beautiful fragrance?" I said. Then I proceeded to tell her all the lovely things about that earthy smell that Lynne had said to me earlier in the day.

"Don't you like it here?" I asked shyly. "I like to come here and just sit and think sometimes."

"Yeah. Neat. What do you think about?"

After some hesitation and a few 'Well's 'Er's and 'Gee's I began. "I think about God. When I'm all alone and it's very peaceful, and the wind is blowing in the tops of the trees, and the ground smells good just like today, I get this funny feeling, like, you know ... like God is right here beside me. And I just feel kind of glad inside."

"Gee," said Karen slowly, "I'm happy you're my friend. You're a neat person."

"Now can I show you another secret place?" I asked brightly. I took her across the tracks of the North Shore Line and into the Northwestern train station, down the stairs, and into the tunnel running under the tracks where I used to play with my fifth grade friend, Judy. I taught Karen the "E-Bureed-Egitaw" game in which we imagined a loose brick in the wall which, when removed, would lead not only to the buried treasure, but to other connecting tunnels running all around under the city. Karen loved it.

"But we haven't found the treasure yet!" she exclaimed as I pulled her away.

"If you're going to become a brain like Lynne and me, and write fantastic reports, we'll have to come to the library lots, and we can keep coming back to this tunnel." We both knew we had to get home. Along the way we talked about where else we might look for secret places.

The next week we turned in our reports. Lynne's was the weightiest, pound-wise. Everyone marveled at my beautiful cover drawing of the Eiffel Tower. But when Mr. Waller saw Karen's report he nearly called a school holiday. It was so carefully done, full of facts; and--it was on time!

The Old Mill Stream

I had come home from school with Lynne for another sleepover. She was trying to teach me Spanish. But there was something about the wet wildness I was seeing out her back window that made me feel restless and adventuresome. I begged. I wheedled. Finally Lynne put down the Spanish book, pulled on her boots and we were off! Her nondescript backyard melted into a field that was slowly becoming a forest. We entered the woods beyond on a well-worn trail. Lynne was chattering about the days events at school. I was peering into the wet shadows for a glimpse of a rabbit or other woodsy critter. That's why the outdoors had called to me on this cold gray day! It reminded me of the pictures in the book my mother had read to me called *The Wind in the Willows*. Perhaps I would see a mole or a rat.

“And when he said to me, 'Yaw research was jes outstanding, Honey!' and he gazed into my eyes with those beautiful blue wells of his, well really, Dianne, I had this urge to pat his shiny bald head and ask him if he'd like to be my model for Apollo!”

“You what?” I exclaimed.

“I do think he would make a cute Apollo, don't you? That would be a wonderful finishing touch to my project about Greek gods.”

“Geesh! He just said I did a good job. He didn't call me 'Honey' or anything. You'd better watch it, Lynne.” I was teasing, but really, I was jealous. We both had a terrible crush on Mr. Waller.

By now the path had turned and was following a gurgling

stream. Lynne wanted to turn back but I wanted to see where the stream and the path went.

“What did you think of Karen's project?” I asked.

“I don't know. I just saw the cover. At least she didn't have a smiley face on her sun.”

“You should ask to read it. It was actually quite impressive.”

“We have to go back now. I'm not allowed to go farther than this.” Here a willow bent way over the stream dipping its bare branches into the water and just beyond a dead tree trunk blocked the path making a perfect bench.

I gazed longingly into the misty turning of the path beyond.

“Let's just sit here a moment. Do you have any critters in these woods?” I asked, peering into the brown and gray shadows. A squirrel scampered up a nearby tree as if in answer.

Lynne sat down carefully on the wet log. I plopped down beside her.

We were very quiet for a time listening to woodsy sounds.

You know,” said Lynne, “this is called the Old Mill Trail. Would you like to hear a story about it?”

Of course I did.

“There once was a mill on this stream many, many years ago. That's why it's called Old Mill Trail and that's why our road is called Old Mill Road. The creek was fuller then and it drove a mill. Farmers for miles around would bring their corn and wheat

to this mill to be ground. The miller lived there with his wife and two children and they were very happy. Then one night Indians came creeping through the woods and they burned the mill to the ground!”

At that point I looked around apprehensively and grabbed hold of Lynne.

“Relax, dear! There are no Indians here now! It was okay. The whole family was saved. It was autumn. They were all down in their fruit cellar harvesting their apple crop. The Indians couldn't find them and the fire didn't burn them. But their home and their livelihood were destroyed so they moved away and never came back. Now people use this trail in the summer for riding their horses. I guess someone will have to move our bench before then. Come on! Let's go home. I'm cold!”

I wanted to know exactly where the mill had been but Lynne didn't know. I wanted to know where the trail went. “Oh it goes on a ways. That part is just like this part,” she said waving vaguely toward the unknown.

I thought it was a strange and exciting story. Lynne assured me it was true because her father had told it to her. I thought it was weird people would be down in their fruit cellar in the middle of the night in days before electricity. But I didn't say anything because I wanted to believe.

We walked back to Lynne's singing “Down by the Old Mill Stream.”

That night as we prepared for bed Lynne was asking me more questions about my Dad and Kate. I was starting to accept the fact that their marriage was going to happen. I still had a funny feeling about it that I could not easily name. I talked about the

mean kids in Highland Park that said I belonged in an orphanage because I didn't have a mother.

“At least if they get married, then we'll be more like a normal family—like yours.” I had admired the way everyone talked around the dinner table. They all seemed to like one another in Lynne's family. “I'm tired of being different.”

Lynne looked at me thoughtfully. “You feel different because you don't have a mom, right?” she asked. “Do you really feel like you're different from everyone else?”

“Yes!” I replied emphatically.

“Well how about Karen? She doesn't have a dad and her mom has to work day and night.”

“She's kind of different too,” I admitted, “but at least she's not fat!”

“I see,” said Lynne, “You are different from everyone else because you don't have a mom and because you are fat.”

I didn't say anything. I just sat there feeling embarrassed. Maybe I shouldn't have told her that I felt different.

“Well, I'll tell you something,” Lynne continued with a sly smile, “You're not really fat. You just think you are. You and I are both advanced for our age. And I'll tell you something else. How do you think I feel?” Her voice was getting a little louder now. “I've been different since the day I was born!”

“Really?” I asked incredulously. I knew Lynne was different from any friend I had ever had before, but I never thought of her as being Different in the way I felt Different.

“Yes! Do you know that I learned to read when I was two years old? By the time I started school I could read any book in the house. The other kids would be making mud pies and I'd be reciting poems by Longfellow and they'd just wrinkle their noses and move away. I've always been a world removed in my own mind from what I saw other kids doing. It wasn't until I got into about fourth grade that I started to get a little bit wise and kept some of my ideas to myself. That's when I began to make a few friends but it was always hard not to have anyone to talk to about things. I guess that's why I talk to my dolls.”

“Goll!” was all I could think of for a moment. And then, “Your dad really taught you to read when you were two years old?”

“No. He told my mother to, so my mother taught me.”

“Gee-whiz!” exclaimed Lynne suddenly, holding her head, “I feel different because I live in a world of ideas far removed from other kids. You feel different because you haven't got a mother and you think you're fat, although you're not. Karen feels different because her dad died and they're kind of poor. And how about Billy? I bet he feels different because his ears stick straight out and make his head look like a sugar bowl.”

“They do?”

“And the other Lynn, I bet she feels different because she's the only one who faints in class,” she continued.

“Gosh, do you think everyone at school feels different?” I wondered.

“I'll bet ,” said Lynne, “that if you knew all about everybody in

that class, you'd find that every kid had something that made him feel like he was really different from everyone else.” Lynne had the satisfied smile of one who has just discovered one of life's basic truths.

“And how about Mr. Waller,” I asked, “Does he feel different too?”

“Well he is short. Most men would rather be tall, like my dad. But he may be used to the idea of being short. It doesn't seem to bother him.”

“Do let me know when you're ready to ask him to model for your Apollo. I want to see his face,” I teased.

“Ah yes! Apollo!” Lynne enthused. “Have I told you all about these marvelous Greeks? Let's get our pajamas on and I'll tell you about them. They are fascinating!”

So we donned our PJs and settled into Lynne's cozy bed. Lynne began reciting everything she knew about Greek gods and goddesses, which was a lot. She told about Apollo, god of music and light, pulling the sun across the sky with his golden chariot. And Persephone, goddess of springtime, who brought the lovely spring flowers and helped the gardens grow. But dark Hades stole her away to be his queen in the land of the dead. Lynne's voice reminded me of the gurgling Old Mill Stream. I began to doze. And so I drifted into dreamland with Lynne lovingly recounting the story of Persephone.

The Dream

Outside Lynne's window the moon was rising big and yellow, past full, above the wild meadow and woods we had walked through earlier in the day.

I floated along the moon-lit path, sometimes above it, other times almost part of it. The air was warm, caressing my skin. I thought how can this be when earlier in the day we had walked through the cold and wet beneath leafless trees. When I reached the trail alongside the stream the moon made shadows of tree trunks criss-crossing the path. I was thinking to use the shadows as a hopscotch form but then I noticed up ahead, around the bend, a sort of glow, brighter than the moonlight. I floated toward it and peered around a tree. Seated on the grass clothed all in white was a beautiful woman.

"I've been waiting for you," she said softly and held out her arms to me.

"Oh Mommy," I cried. I ran to her and buried myself in the gossamer folds of her dress. "I've searched and searched for you!" I sobbed. I felt my tears overflowing and running all about us in the grass. She stroked me gently and I felt like I was wrapped in warm velvet. "Everyone has a special job to do in the world and in their next life. I loved being your mommy. You brought me such joy. I could not have wished for a better daughter. Now you mustn't look for me anymore. I'm always around but only this one time will God let you see me. He has a new job for me. I will help bring spring to the world."

I sank deeper into the soft white folds of her garment. I was so enraptured, I didn't feel sad at the news this was to be a one-time



I was wrapped in warm velvet

encounter. Then my curiosity kicked in. “What will my special job be?”

“Oh my dear little one! You are different but not because I had to leave you too soon. You are different and special because God blessed you with the gift of a Glad Heart. Because of this gift you will have an important and difficult job to do, but I cannot tell you what it is. You must remember to say 'Thank You' to God every morning and every evening and He will help you to keep your heart bright and glad. If you thank God every day you will be able to do your difficult and important job when the time comes.”

Though I could still see her I could no longer feel her presence.

“Run along now, my dear. They're waiting for you. Go.” Her soft voice was fading too as an ethereal hand pointed ahead down the path.

“Who's waiting for me?” But her image had faded into the moonlight. I sat still blinking, trying to refocus my eyes and find her again. All that remained was the warmth and a clean fragrance. And a sprinkle of white blossoms in the grass.

I gathered myself up and continued along the path. Around the next turn the small stream had changed to a broad river. And it was day. There was a loud whooshing sound, and then I saw it--the mill. On one side of a small brown building a large mill-wheel creaked and groaned as the water pushed it slowly around. I ran to the other side. I could hear a deep voice in song. When I peeked into the large mill house I realized my father was inside, singing, as he ground bushels of wheat. Beyond the mill was the cottage with an apple-cheeked woman at the door.

“Come! we've been waiting!” she called. I realized it was Kate. “I need you to help me with the pies,” she said with a warm smile.

“My Daddy is singing!” I exclaimed. I had never heard him sing before.

“Yes, he sings all the time now. Do you want to help me with this? All we need to do is fill these crusts with the cut-up apples and cinnamon and sugar and butter.” So I helped Kate prepare several dozen pies and we put them into the gargantuan oven. I looked around and discovered the small cottage had turned into a huge castle.

“While we're waiting for the Indians I'll show you what we did to your room.”

“What Indians?”

“The Indians will be coming for the pies soon.”

“Up this way.” Kate led me into a very large room and then up a staircase that ascended into a tower. The stairs wound round and round inside the tower, but they weren't difficult to climb. Kate and I sort of floated up. When we got to the top we stepped into a beautiful pink gingham bedroom. The bed had a pink gingham bedspread and canopy. The window had ruffled pink gingham curtains blowing out into the warm air. I stepped to the window and could see far and wide across the river, over the tree tops, past fields and pastures. I was at eye level with clouds. I looked down on birds in flight. Then I saw the Indians coming down a far hillside.

“Oh Kate! They're coming!” I hollered as I ran down the long spiral staircase and back into the kitchen.

The pies were all crispy and done. I helped Kate carry them out into the yard to cool on a wooden bench. When I turned back toward the castle it was a cottage again. I thought I saw something pink fluttering from an upper window.

Daddy had stopped working and was enjoying his pie with the Indians.

Then it was night again and I was floating above the trail, above the treetops full of blossoms and baby leaves

I opened my eyes. The moonlight was streaming in through Lynne's window across our bed. Lynne was snoring gently beside me. What a strange vivid dream! I did not want to forget one detail. I went over it again and again in my mind. Then I folded my hands and said, “Thank you God, for this beautiful dream, for letting me see Mommy. And thank you for Lynne, and for Kate, and for the springtime.”

In the morning my first move was to rush to the window to see if spring had come. But no--the sky was clear and blue but the landscape was gray and brown.

All morning Lynne gave me funny looks. “Are you OK?” she asked. “You look different. You were crying in your sleep but I couldn't wake you up.”

“It's OK,” I said, smiling. “Did you know I have a Glad Heart?” Eventually, I told parts of the dream--about the castle and the Indians. But the part about my mother, I held deep in my soul.

Orchestra Candy

The very next time I saw Karen I had to tell her all about the Old Mill Stream. Karen wanted to go check it out immediately, though she didn't believe half the story Lynne had told me. Karen said Lynne had lied in the part about the Indians creeping through the woods. I indignantly defended Lynne and her wonderful imagination, though I admitted she might fantasize a bit on occasion. Karen said fantasizing was just a fancy term for lying. I responded that if Karen thought Lynne was lying it was just because she, Karen, was not in Lynne's intellectual category. I thought that remark would set Karen in her place. But Karen, who was not easily insulted replied calmly, "Yeah sure, intellectual category, my foot! That's what Lynne says about me, isn't it. That's just another of her fancy words. It means she think I'm dumb. So what! Lynne lies, I'm dumb, and you're fat. Nobody's perfect!"

"Karen!" I was deeply hurt.

"Aw, sorry!" Karen apologized immediately. "You're not really fat. But then I'm not very dumb. That intellectual category is reserved for my brother!"

We both laughed at that. "And Lynne doesn't tell very big lies," I added.

"But I still want to see this Old Mill Stream with or without Indians," Karen insisted. "When can we go?"

I was eager to show it to her and explore the whole of it. But our plans were temporarily thwarted by events in orchestra. I played the violin in the Oak Terrace Orchestra. I wasn't very good because I never practiced violin, only piano. But I always

showed up and I was halfway fair at sight reading. So they let me stay.

The week before spring break Mrs. Miller, the orchestra teacher, announced we would be having a candy sale to raise money for band and orchestra. She showed us the candy bars. They were huge! Four ounces of milk chocolate, some plain, some with almonds. Each candy wrapper had a photo of the combined band and orchestra. Mrs. Miller passed one bar around the room for everyone to see. There I was, in the violin section, with a piece of white scarf sticking straight up out of my head.

The bars were to sell for 50 cents apiece of which the school would keep half. There would be prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place in total sales. The sale would last two weeks which would include Easter vacation. Then Mrs. Miller cut up two bars into very small pieces so everyone could have a sample. Yum!

I thought back to the fun it had been to sell cards with Lynne before Christmas. Yes, I told the teacher. I'd like to sell candy and that day I went home with two boxes, 24 bars in each.

"Karen!" I yelled as I raced across the playground after school with boxes flailing, "You have to help me sell candy. We're having a contest in orchestra. If I win you can have half the prize! It's delicious!"

"Are we going to sell it or eat it?" asked Karen.

"Both! Would you like to buy one? Only 50 cents for the most mouth watering hunk of chocolate you've ever tasted!"

Opposite page: Oak Terrace School Orchestra 1954-1955



“All I got is a quarter.”

“Then I'll sell you a half.”

“Okay. Come on over and bring the goods.”

So we traipsed to Karen's house lugging both boxes. We each dutifully put a quarter into the empty collection envelope before carefully dividing one bar in half. Then we each cut off a small piece for David and Mrs. Poelman.

“Delicious!” said Mrs. Poelman and she bought two bars.

“Ah!” David sighed, “Such taste! Such texture! Such ...” Here he rolled his eyes, clutched his throat, and began gasping for breath. “Help!” he exclaimed, falling down and rolling on the floor, “Give me water! Give me air! I've been poisoned by the wicked witch of chocolate!”

I looked around uncertainly. Karen and Mrs. Poelman were laughing so I laughed too.

David giggled out of his fit. “Can I have more?” he begged.

“Fifty cents for the next bite!” I answered.

“Can I have some money, Mom?” he implored.

“No! I bought two. You can have some for dessert tonight. It's not good to be eating sweets all the time. Run along girls and sell your candy.”

We took off eagerly with boxes in hand. We had just turned the corner onto Everet when we met Teddy.

“Whatcha doin?” he called, brightly. Teddy wasn't very bright in school but he had a brilliant personality. He lived at the other end of the block from me on Everts. When he heard what we were up to, he wanted to help. Since he was kind of cute we quickly agreed, which was a wise decision as it turned out, because he knew everyone on the block. By the time we got back to my house the first box was totally empty. That afternoon had been special, walking along with the spring sun sinking behind the leafless trees, the birds tweeting, the smell of garlic and onions wafting over the street from many mothers making supper, and a cute boy besides.

“Gosh thanks!” I said shyly. “Can you come with us again tomorrow?”

“Nope! Gotta go to catechism tomorrow. See ya!” All the Italian kids that went to Oak Terrace rather than St. James, the Catholic school, had to attend catechism once a week.

That evening Aunt Musa was very interested in the candy. She agreed to take the remaining box to the Y to sell. Getting rid of my two whole boxes in one day encouraged me, so the next day I asked Mrs. Miller for two more.

After school the following day Karen and I started out again, but alas! We had already done my street and hardly anyone was home on the next street and the boxes were getting heavy.

“I know what let's do,” I suggested. “Let's go home and get my bike.” I hadn't ridden it since fall but I remembered riding Karen around on the back fender seat and that had worked, and besides, I had a big basket. The two cartons fit into it nicely. Of course the tires needed pumping so we walked it down to the corner gas station, pumped them up, and were off. Only the gas station had

been downhill. Pedaling uphill with Karen on the back proved a challenge.

When we finally made it back to my house Karen had a revelation. "I know!" she exclaimed. "You get on the seat and start pedaling and then I'll take over and pedal."

We tried that. And oh my gosh! It worked! I sat on the seat and steered and Karen sat on the back fender seat and pedaled. I didn't quite know what to do with my feet with Karen pedaling from behind so I put them up on the handle bars. After we rode up and down Evert a few times, thoroughly delighted with our discovery, we tried it the other way around with Karen steering and me sitting in back pedaling. That worked even better! And so we proceeded to sell candy bars on the other streets in town using our new bicycling technique between houses. Whenever my legs got tired we switched seats and Karen pedaled for awhile. We sold a few bars but our luck wasn't nearly so good as it had been the day before because all the other orchestra members had been out selling.

"Next time we'll have to try the streets in Highland Park," I said. "Those kids aren't having a candy sale."

And just to be sure we'd have enough, I brought home two more cartons on the last day before Easter vacation.

The following Monday Karen came over early. We had planned to pack a picnic lunch and spend the whole day selling candy bars using our new bicycling method for transportation. Karen found me bent over the stove stirring a pot of brown liquid.

"What's that?" she asked.



We were off on an adventure.

“Oh, Aunt Musa makes the best fudge! I thought I'd try her recipe and we can take it with us.”

Karen sniffed the pot. “Looks more like chocolate soup,” she said as she stuck her finger in. “Tastes good though,” she added, licking it off.

“It should start to thicken soon,” I said hopefully as I continued to stir. Since I couldn't leave the pot Karen rummaged in the refrigerator to find some fruit and sandwich makings. She quickly assembled two sandwiches and wrapped them in wax paper. She was ready to go--just waiting for me and the fudge.

Stir. Stir.

“Are you sure you're doing that right?”

“Well--I think it has to set for awhile. Aunt Musa pours it into a pan and lets it cool, then it gets nice and hard.”

“You mean we're going to stand around all morning waiting for this stuff to get hard?”

“I'll tell you what let's do. Under the sink there's a jar with a lid. Get that out. We'll pour the fudge in and by the time we stop for lunch it'll be set.”

So that's what we did.

Going into my bedroom to get the candy we found Linda Sue, our cat, curled up on my bed next to Oscar, my teddy bear.

“Aw, how sweet!” said Karen.

“Hi, Karen!” I picked up Oscar and made him talk to Karen with

my "Oscar" voice. "Did You say I'm sweet? I'm sweet!..I'm sweet!. I love you! Smack! Smack! Smack!" I made him kiss Karen.

Karen giggled, "Help! Get that furry thing out of my face! Look Oscar, your kitty misses you. She doesn't want to share you."

It was true. As soon as I had picked up Oscar, Linda Sue had gotten up and prowled restlessly around the bed. I placed Oscar back on the pillow and Linda Sue settled down next to him.

"Aunt Musa thinks Linda Sue is going to have kittens," I said.

"I thought she looked fat," replied Karen. "Say! Maybe she'll have teddy kittens!"

We were still laughing about the teddy kittens as we loaded up the bike with two cartons of candy bars and a large sack of lunch. Karen took the fender and I took the seat as we started off down Prairie Road with her pedaling and me steering. The sky was blue, the sun was shining, the air was warm and fresh against our faces, and we were off on an adventure. Little did we know what success and disaster the day would bring.

We rode down Prairie and under the railroad tracks toward Lake Michigan and found a road lined with large brick houses, each with a huge lovely lawn.

"Rich people live here," I said. "They should be able to afford candy."

Karen began marching up to the front of the first large house but I whispered that we'd better go to the side door. A small woman in a gray uniform and crisp white apron answered our ring. She quickly told us she was not interested in buying candy and

neither was anyone else at that residence.

And neither was anyone else on that street! We were met only by people in uniforms. "I guess these people are too rich to buy candy. I certainly thought we'd sell some along here!" I moaned.

"Maybe the maids aren't supposed to buy stuff for the people who live there and they don't have enough money to buy stuff for themselves," offered Karen.

"Yeah, maybe. Let's go over by the hospital. Lynne and I had good luck selling Christmas cards in that neighborhood. The people there aren't too rich or too poor."

So back we went, under the tracks to the hospital neighborhood. When someone answered the door, Karen and I took turns making our pitch. And our luck was quite fair. About one person in three bought a candy bar. Some bought two!

At one house I recognized the woman who answered the door. It was our landlord's wife! Mrs. Landlord was sweet and friendly.

She bought a bar and asked about the orchestra. I showed her where I was in the candy bar picture.

"My goodness! She's a lot fatter than the last time I saw her!" I exclaimed as we walked away.

"Dianne! She's pregnant! Couldn't you tell?" exclaimed Karen in amazement.

"She's what?"

"Pregnant. You know. Like Linda Sue!"

"Oh." I didn't recall having heard that word before. But I certainly didn't want to tell Karen.

After awhile we came to a house where Karen knew the woman who answered the door. She bought THREE candy bars. No one had ever bought three before.

"She brings sewing to Mom," Karen explained as we walked away.

"Is she rich?" I asked.

"Gosh yes! You should see the beautiful dresses she brings in. Mom says they must cost forty or fifty dollars apiece!"

I shared that Aunt Musa frequently bought forty dollar dresses and I knew that because I went with her to Chicago to buy them. "She needs nice clothes for her job at the Y," I explained.

Karen retorted, "If your aunt is that rich, maybe she should buy you a new pair of shoes."

I looked down at my shoes. One had a hole starting at the toe. On the other, the sole was flapping just a little bit, in the front. I really hadn't noticed before. "Well, Aunt Musa isn't rich," I countered defensively, "She just likes to spend money." I quickly noticed how silly that sounded. Then I realized it was true. After a moment's thought I added, "Since Daddy came to live with us Aunt Musa probably thinks he should buy me shoes."

Karen and I traveled a long way that day. We went past the hospital, past downtown Highland Park, through many neighborhoods west and south of downtown, some that were new

even to me. We had sold one whole box of bars and were well on our way to finishing off the second when we came to a park.

“Let's have lunch!” suggested Karen. So we laid down the bike and sprawled on the ground under a large leafless tree. “How's the fudge?” she asked, chomping down on her bologna and cheese sandwich.

I pulled the jar of fudge out from the bottom of the bag. I held it up for Karen to see. “Hmm ... ” I said as the brown liquid sloshed about. “Oh well,” I added brightly, “It will still taste good.”

“Did you bring spoons?”

“Nope. But we can just drink it,” I answered. I took a big swig. “Um good!” I licked my lips. “Try some.”

Karen tried some. “I guess it's OK,” she said doubtfully.

“Want some more?” I was eager to share.

“Too sweet!”

So I drank most of the rest of the jar of liquid fudge.

“That won't do much for your shape,” warned Karen.

“I suppose you're right,” I agreed, feeling guilty.

“And look! You've spilled it all over your front!”

“Oh no!” I looked down and there was a big brown streak all down the front of my red sweater. Fortunately Karen had packed lots of napkins, and fortunately, the park water fountain was

already turned on. And fortunately, we had sold most of our candy bars because, though she did her best to help me clean myself up, I was still a mess and didn't think I looked good enough to knock on peoples' doors and try to sell them stuff. So we started for home, enjoying the warm spring afternoon, just taking our time.

First, I'd sit on the back and pedal and Karen would sit on the seat and steer. She'd see a street that looked inviting and turn that direction. Then we'd switch. She'd pedal and I would steer and pick the route, always heading, more or less, homeward. And we were getting close--only four more blocks. Karen was pedaling. We were going down a slight hill. I noticed a road on the right where the sun was shining on the tree tops turning them golden in the late afternoon light. So I turned. I didn't say, "Let's turn here," like I usually did. I didn't say anything. I just turned. We were going too fast to turn. The bike hit the curb and threw us both onto the ground but not before shoving Karen into the back edge of the seat right at her pubic bone. There we were, Karen, me and the bike in one huge messy heap. Karen writhed in agony. I pulled the bike off of us and knelt down beside her.

"Ooooooh!" Karen let out a long wail and began to whimper breathlessly.

"Are you girls alright?" called a lady from the front porch of the house where we'd landed.

I looked at Karen. "Are we alright or should I have this lady call an ambulance?" I asked.

Karen managed a weak grin. "Holy cow! I'm not that hurt!"

"Yeah, we're fine," I yelled to the lady and she went back into her house.

I helped Karen to her feet. "Can you walk?"

"Come on!" she gasped, with enough air to add, "Let's get out of here before the police come and arrest us for reckless bicycling."

We walked the bike the rest of the way home. I knew I should have warned Karen that I was about to turn. I could have waited an extra block. The sunlight probably would have made pretty colors in the trees on the next street. I felt guilty and ... stupid! I was supposed to be the smart one. Karen was supposed to be stupid. Ha! That theory was standing on its head.

"What on earth happened to you?" Aunt Musa asked when I came in the door.

I ran and looked in the bathroom mirror. Not only did I still have a great brown stain all down my front, I discovered I was also bloody. The handle bar, which did not have a guard on the end, had torn through my sweater and through my shirt and up through the flesh of my arm. Aunt Musa helped me bandage it and "Hmphed" about the mess I'd made of my clothes. I was able to mend the sweater myself but the shirt was a loss. And I had a handlebar shaped scar on my arm for decades afterward. Karen was fine by the next day and ready for more adventures.

Fortunately, the few candy bars remaining in the box were not damaged by our disaster. Aunt Musa took them to the Y and sold them.

The first day back after Easter I turned in my money and reported I had sold 144 candy bars for the Oak Terrace Orchestra. I had the highest sales by far so I won the first prize. It was a five dollar gift certificate to a music store. I bought a new A string for my violin and the John Thompson Third Grade Book for piano. I saved up my allowance, well most of it, until I had enough to give Karen \$2.50, her share of the prize.

Expedition Number One

“What I like about spring,” Karen was saying, “Is you can see what color your socks are when you open your drawer in the morning without having to turn on the light.”

“What I like is all the flowers. Just look at that house!” We were passing a yard decorated with a large bed of pink tulips. We heard robins chirping heartily. We could see and smell small trees in bloom. We greedily inhaled spring.

“Do you know where we're going?” Karen asked from the rear of the bike.

“Well--” I replied, “I think I sort of know, but not exactly. I kind of have a feeling that we should go this way, but since I've never been here before, from this direction anyway, it's kind of hard to tell for certain. Do you get what I mean?”

“Yes,” said Karen, “You mean 'No'”

Earlier in the day the two of us had decided the time was right to search for the Old Mill Stream. We had not ridden the bike together since the day of the accident and Karen sat down on the rear seat gingerly. I thought we should stick to a more traditional style of pedaling and since we were going mostly downhill it was no problem.

Actually, I did have a very good idea of where the stream was without going all the way to Lynne's house, which was a long ways away. Lynne's house was a little east of Skokie and a mile or more north of Prairie. Every time I rode in the car down Prairieto Skokie` I noticed how the road crossed a creek. And further on I noticed a dirt road leading away from Prairie back

into some trees. It was to this dirt road I was now taking Karen. But I was not absolutely sure I was right.

And here it was! We veered off the street into the ruts of the dirt road. "Is this the place?" asked Karen, her brown eyes squinting expectantly through her blue-rimmed glasses, as she peered into the sun streaked woods.

We went slowly over the rough ground. "I think it is," I said. Ahead the road turned, went up an embankment and disappeared into the trees. "Let's leave the bike here." We got off, laid the bike in the tall grass and walked toward the trees.

When we got to the top of the bank, the road dwindled to a hard path overgrown with weeds. The path turned beyond the trees, which were just a woodsy border to a very large field full of yellow flowers.

"Karen!" I cried in delight, "It's a sea of flowers!"

She, too, stared in awe. "There must be a million of 'em!" she exclaimed.

We grabbed hands and rushed into the flowers. They were so thick and tall we did not get far.

"Why Karen! They're dandelions! Can you believe it?"

"They're giants!" said Karen. "Look, this one comes above my waist! And the stem is as big around as my finger! Look at this one! It's as big as my face! And they're too tough to pick," she added as she tried to break one off. "Oh, ick! They're all sticky," she added, looking at her hands.

"And they're too deep to walk through. Just imagine, this must

be what the pioneers felt like,” I said. “Around every bend and over every hill, a new discovery waiting to be seen.”

“Hey! Let's be pioneers!” suggested Karen, and then, “Alright men, unhitch them oxen! Grab the scythe and cut down some o' them weeds. We need to make camp and start a fire. I'm starved!”

“Let the womenfolk tend to dinner while we scout around for Indians,” I added gleefully. We hurried back to the path and followed it into more woods beyond where we had entered the field. We ran and giggled through the trees pretending to be pioneers hunting Indians. But when we came around a bend we stopped abruptly.

A meandering brook appeared before us. It gurgled and foamed and sparkled in the shadowy light. We stared in silence for a moment.

“Is this it?” Karen asked, wrinkling her nose and looking at me expectantly.

“Yes it is!” I felt confident and pleased with myself. “This is the Old Mill Stream.”

Here the path became more well-defined and followed along the edge of the stream. It beckoned us onward. So on we walked, the stream rushing by on one side, the branches of trees arching overhead. Across the stream the woods grew thicker. The sun's afternoon rays shone into the brush, illuminating small buds which dissolved into velvety green shadows.

I peered into the green haze and remembered the dream I had had that seemed so real at the time. Now here I was walking through the same woods, by the same stream. I was thinking if I

looked hard enough I might see my mother staring back at me. But no, she had told me I wouldn't see her again. Besides, it was one thing to see her in a dream and quite another to see her when awake!

Karen's excited voice jogged me loose from my reverie. "Hey look! What's that," she shouted. Up ahead something large projected from the water. We ran and discovered not just one thing but a large pile of junk. The stream churned and whooshed around it.

"Oh my goodness! How can people be so messy and do this to this nice lovely stream?" I said indignantly.

Karen had grabbed a stick and busily poked at the pile from the bank. There were numerous gray rotting boards sticking up at various angles. Some rusty pieces of metal had tangled in the debris. And of course, there were rusty cans and paper trash that had hung up in the general jumble.

"Isn't this just a disgrace," I continued. "I suppose some careless idiot came by and threw trash here and everyone after that just added to it."

Karen poked intently with her stick. "Why would anyone haul their trash way back here? This isn't even near a road."

"Hmm, you do have a point there," I said thoughtfully.

Karen's stick jarred something loose and the pile shifted, exposing some pieces of wood that looked charred on the ends.

"Karen!" I suddenly had goose bumps all over. "You don't suppose ..."

“That we've found the wreck of the old mill? Just think. What else could it be way back here far from any roads?” Of course neither of us could think of any other explanation so it HAD to be the old mill.

I grabbed a stick from the bushes and we both lay on the stream bank jabbing the pile to see what else we might find. We found a soggy cardboard box, some broken glass and tree branches that we agreed were more recent additions. Then the pile shifted again and dislodged a wooden crate partially intact. After much fishing I pulled out something that had once been a teacup or small pitcher. It was hard to tell. The handle was broken. Most of one side and the bottom were missing. It was a faded blue with little flowers. We decided it had to be the miller's wife's best china. We stayed there for a long time poking at the pile. We found lots of trash and a few other broken dishes but none so lovely as the first with the little flowers.

“This just has to be the old mill” I declared. “Hey! Let's look around and see if we can find any apple trees. Remember? The miller and his wife were in the cellar harvesting their apples when the Indians came and burned the mill!”

So we ran along the path looking for apple trees. Neither of us knew what an apple tree looked like, without the apples on it, but we were sure if we found one we would know. The path widened and entered a grassy area, and there in the corner was a small tree full of pink buds. Karen walked around it examining it carefully. “I think this may be it,” she said decisively.

“Oh Karen! We found it! We found it” We grabbed hands and jumped up and down with glee.

“Lynne didn't find it. We found it,” Karen chortled. “Are you

going to tell her?"

"I don't know. I'll wait awhile."

"Maybe it can be our secret place, just you and me. Let's climb!," said Karen gleefully on her way up. I climbed up after her and settled comfortably in a crook of the tree while Karen cavorted from branch to branch.

"Sit down and look, Karen! You're going to knock all the buds off!"

So Karen sat down and looked.

We were on the edge of a small glade. The grass was emerald green, the sky a perfect clear blue and across the stream the brown woods clothed in the green gauze of early spring. We sat very still entranced by the loveliness.

I tingled inside to think just around the bend lay the wreck of the old mill. My mind wandered over the stuff we had found in the stream. Slowly they took the form of the mill and then the mill castle of my dream. When I thought of the dream castle my being was flooded with a sensation of warm happiness and I remembered my mother's words to me. "You have the gift of a glad heart."

Right then I was very glad indeed. I was glad for the warm spring day, for the merry bird songs, for the adventure of the old mill, and for Karen with whom I could share it all.

A small rabbit hopped out of the brush and nibbled in the grass then hopped away.

“Aw! How cute!” I whispered .

“Yeah,” replied Karen, “There's just one thing. If this is one of the mill's apple trees, why isn't it very big? This mill story happened when there were Indians around here and that was awhile ago, right?”

“Well ...” I replied thoughtfully, “Some trees never get very big, just like some people. It's probably just a small tree.”

“Or maybe their trees got old and died and this one grew up from an apple that got buried.”

“Maybe that's it,” I agreed. “Be quiet now and maybe more animals will come.”

But Karen had sat still long enough. She jumped down from the tree and wanted to explore farther down the path, but I thought we should start for home. I promised we'd come back soon and explore some more. We hid our beautiful broken pot in the bushes and started back.

When we came to the field of giant dandelions Karen said in a loud deep voice, “Say, Pardner, I hope them womenfolk got the grub ready. I'm starved!”

“Right Pardner,” I answered, “I hope they haven't been scalped!” We both laughed.

“The next time we come let's look for Indian stuff, you know, like arrowheads and feathers and stuff,” Karen suggested.

We found the bike, got back to the road, and I started pedaling again, but it was hard with Karen on the back so we took turns,

and when we came to the hill we got off and walked.

“It's our own secret place, Karen. We won't tell anyone.” We both promised.

Suddenly I felt moved to share another secret. “If I tell you a secret you won't tell anyone will you?” I asked .

“No! What's the secret?”

I studied Karen's face. It was nice to have a friend to share things with, but could I really trust her?

“Yeah, Yeah, go on,” She prompted.

“Ah ... Last night I had this dream you see. I dreamed I grew up and got married and had three beautiful babies and they all looked like ... Mr. Waller!”

“Oh no!” Karen put her hands over her face and laughed and danced around. “They were all bald?”

“Of course not! Oh Karen, if you tell I'm sure I'll die!” Karen was a good friend and fun to do stuff with but I was suddenly sorry I'd told her. Sometimes she was so silly. She might forget.

Then Karen got serious. “Did you know he's getting married?”

“No. When?” I asked, trying to appear calm as my glad heart sank behind a dark cloud.

“As soon as school is out. He told me the last time I had to stay after. Her name is Susan Somebody. I've seen her with him downtown. She's real little and cute. She has curly blonde hair.”

“Why didn't you tell me?” We had reached the top of the hill so I got back on the seat and Karen climbed on behind.

“I guess I forgot. Besides, I wouldn't want to spoil your afternoon.”

No, not my afternoon. Just my life!

Karen babbled on about our wonderful adventure but I didn't hear her.

My dear wonderful beloved Mr. Waller getting married! Is the world coming to an end? You might know she'd be some cute little person. I should have listened to Lynne. She had said he was in love the day he brought the flowers to school. I just didn't want to believe it. I sure wished I hadn't told Karen my dream.

Karen got off at my house, all cheery and bubbly, saying how we'd go back to the old mill tomorrow.

“Yeah sure,” I said with a forced smile, “See ya.”

Cinderella

I moped all through dinner that night. After dinner Daddy and I went out for a drive with Kate. She asked me if I was feeling ill. Daddy left Kate and me in the car alone when we stopped to get gas. She charmed the whole story out of me--my goofy dream, my telling it to Karen, Karen's telling me that Mr. Waller was getting married.

Kate was very kind. She tried to explain to me that lots of girls my age had crushes on older men, that many girls fall in love with their male teachers. Then she said that my aunt's taking me to the Servicemen's Center all the time with all those soldiers and sailors didn't help at all. I didn't tell about the crushes I had had on two special sailors, Bob and George. She said Mr. Waller was a very nice man. She was glad he was getting married. She hoped he'd be happy. She told me there were many, many, fine, kind men in the world and someday, when I grew up, I would meet one and then I'd be very happy too. I wasn't at all sure that was true. I was secretly afraid that Bob and George and Mr. Waller were the only wonderful males in the whole world--besides my daddy, of course. She explained that naturally, Mr. Waller wanted a little woman because he was a little man. And even though I felt sad and disappointed, I should not mope too much because she, Kate, was so lucky she was going to marry my father. She had waited 36 years to find just the right man, and wasn't it incredible that the one she found came with such a nice ready-made family. And she and I were going to have wonderful times together.

Daddy always took a long time to buy gas.

I put my head on Kate's shoulder and let myself be comforted. I was half-mad that Kate could think of anything good to say

about the situation. I knew it had nothing whatsoever to do with the soldiers and sailors. And I was half-embarrassed because I knew the whole story must sound awfully silly. But I was totally glad to be with Kate and feel her soothing sympathetic love.

Even so, I was still moping the next day. Lynne tried to distract me by telling about a wonderful new movie at the Lake Forest theater that I simply must see. It was called *The Glass Slipper*. It starred Leslie Caron, a fantastic French ballerina, and I would just love it, especially with my ballet background.

I cracked a smile at that comment. “I wouldn’t exactly say I have a background in ballet. I took two years and was a clown one year and a gypsy the next. In the recitals, you know.”

“Well, my dear, that’s a background!”

Karen bounced over after school and wanted to go back to the old mill.

I told her I didn’t want to.

“Why?”

“Just cuz.”

We climbed into the cherry trees in my backyard to argue. I was still half-mad at Karen. The thought of going to the old mill brought back her heart-breaking news. Still, it wasn’t really fair to blame Karen as the bearer of bad tidings. I was starting to weaken, when I remembered the movie Lynne had told me about. All year Karen and I had been going to movies. Sometimes we’d go to Highland Park, sometimes Lake Forest. Once we even went to Glencoe. We loved to go to movies.

“I know Karen, there's a good movie at Lake Forest tonight. Let's go see it! It's like the story of Cinderella but more adult and it has ballet in it. I have a background in ballet, you know.”

At Karen's house we hunted for money. I had enough for myself and a little bit extra. Karen had some but not enough. Mrs. Poelman said she didn't have any. I said that under chairs and couch cushions were good places to look. Sometimes change falls out of men's pants pockets when they sit and Mrs. Poelman had a lot of customers coming and sitting while picking up sewing. We found a dime in the couch. We found several coins way back in the corner of the closet and a nickel under the rug. We had accumulated seventy-five cents when Karen discovered a forgotten dollar in a purse in the bottom of her drawer. We were set. In those days a dollar was enough for round-trip on the train, the movie and a box of popcorn besides. Because we were under twelve we only paid half-price.

After dinner at the train station, I presented my birth certificate and asked for the kid-rate round-trip ticket. Daddy had made me a copy because no one believed I was only eleven. There was never a doubt about Karen, though.

The north bound train pulled slowly out of the station. Chug! Chug! Chug! It was an old black steam engine they kept for the local runs. Sometimes we took the North Shore, an electric train, sometimes the Chicago-Northwestern, depending on which one lined up best with the movie times. The two tracks ran parallel to each other through the center of town. This night we were on the Northwestern. We watched the town of Highwood slowly disappear. We passed Fort Sheridan and the North Shore train yard.

“Hey! Look at those woods!” exclaimed Karen. We both glued our noses to the west-facing window. Outside stretched a green and golden woods that seemed to go on and on as we rumbled past until we crossed over Sheridan Road and could see in the distance the lights of the large stately homes of Lake Forest.

The movie was full of music, dance, beautiful costumes, and romance. What young girl could ask for more. Even Karen was dazzled. We meandered back to the station in a dream-like state, past the glowing gaslights of downtown Lake Forest.

We climbed up onto an old freight wagon to wait for the train. The station smelled of train: coal, oil, tar, smoke, steam, old leather baggage; not what one would call fragrant but it was a friendly smell. The station platform where we sat was bathed in a yellow glow, setting it apart as an island in the black night. We were all alone, swinging our legs over the edge of the wagon. Softly, I began to sing one of the songs from the movie:

“Climbing rose on the wall, Pick it now before the petals fall.
Apple ripe on the bough, Pick it for the time to pick is now.”

Shyly, Karen joined in.

“Wasn't he wonderful!” I sighed. “When I grow up I'm going to find a kind, handsome prince and I'm going to turn into a beautiful princess and we will go dancing off into the moonlight and the apple trees and live happily ever after!” I guess I was already forgetting about Mr. Waller.

“When I grow up,” exclaimed Karen jumping down from the wagon, “I'm going to be a fairy godmother!” She skipped around the station waving her imaginary wand, pointing it, and



Waiting for the train on an old freight wagon

saying, "Pickle Relish!" and, "Window sill!" Those were spells the movie fairy godmother had used.

She pointed intently at the wagon, "And I shall turn you into a beautiful coach!"

"I think you may have talents in that direction," I laughed.

In the distance we could see the train coming. It roared into the station with a loud whistle and swish of brakes and a cloud of white steam.

Along the way home we saw the lights of town fade out of sight. Then we watched again for the woods we had seen earlier but all was blackness.

"We need to find that woods," said Karen when I left her by her door.

"Yeah, tomorrow!"

The D-K Woods

"Karen! The kittens are born!" I greeted my friend excitedly when she arrived on Saturday morning.

We tiptoed quietly into the bedroom and peered into the darkness of my closet. We could hear Linda Sue's motor running. She had made a nest of some old clothes and abandoned towels. We could vaguely see her form with four fur balls next to her.

"They are drinking her milk. Aunt Musa says we shouldn't handle them," I explained.

"Aw Shucks!" was Karen's response.

"Well, maybe we could handle only one for only one second." I reached in and gently picked up a tiny kitten. The purring stopped.

It was a tiny ball of fluff, white with black spots. Karen took it gingerly. "Where are its eyes?"

"They're just closed. Aunt Musa says they will be for a few days."

Linda Sue had gotten up and was pacing nervously by the closet door. Karen placed the kitten carefully back with the others and Linda Sue returned to her litter.

"They don't much look like their father. Has Oscar seen them?" asked Karen.

"No, not yet. But they do have lots of fur like he does."

"Yeah, but his is brown. Besides, he has a thread nose." Karen grabbed Oscar off my bed and held him around the closet doorway so he could see the kittens.

"Oh you nut! Let's still call them teddy-cats," I replied. "Did you know that cats had milk?"

"Sure! All animals do. I mean mammals. Mr. Wirth says mammals are animals that make milk for their babies, remember?" He was our science teacher.

"Maybe I heard that, but before Linda Sue I thought just cows made milk."

"Oh Dianne! Sometimes you are so dumb for a smart person," Karen exclaimed. "Haven't you ever seen anyone breastfeed a baby?"

"Huh?... You mean people have milk too? I thought human babies got milk from bottles."

"Well, what do you think they did before bottles were invented?"

"Gee, I never thought about that!" I was startled by this totally new concept. "Did you see someone feed a baby...that way?"

"Oh sure. One of Mom's customers comes up with her baby and nurses him. That's what she calls it, nursing. Only you can't actually see anything, and I've tried! She pulls up her blouse and covers up with a blanket and he starts sucking away."

I could feel my mouth hanging open. After that new fact-of-life had settled for a moment I asked, "If that's so, why do people feed babies with bottles?"

"Got me! Maybe they're just ignorant, like you! C'mon, let's get going!"

I was too stunned to take offense and couldn't let the topic go so easily. "So if people make milk for their babies just like cows and cats, do you think people are animals?" I whispered.

"Sure! Did you ever see my brother eat? ... Just like a pig. Snort! Snort!"

At that, we giggled our way out of the house into the fresh May sunshine.

We walked through town until we came to the sidewalk that bordered the woods on the north edge of Highwood. It was the woods we had seen from the train window several nights earlier. But how to get in? Between the sidewalk and the woods were tall weeds and bushes, some with thorns, forming a wall. Karen was getting excited.

"How do we get in? Is it full of these bushes? That sure won't be fun." She was skipping and running back and forth, looking for an entrance. I was poking at the bushes with a stick trying to find a path or a passage of some sort. When I looked back at Karen, she had disappeared.

"Karen! Karen!" I called. "This isn't funny. Where are you?"

After a moment I heard the cracking of sticks and then Karen's head stuck out of the bushes up ahead, low to the ground.

"Oh my gosh!" she exclaimed, "Come quick! It's amazing!" She turned around and scampered back into the woods through the rabbit tunnel she'd found, for that was what it seemed to be. I,

being larger and not so nimble, had considerable trouble wiggling along under and between the bushes, but I soon made it through and joined Karen standing in awe of the beautiful forest we had managed to enter. The bushes had stopped abruptly. High above us the trees formed a sky-speckled canopy of young leaves, held up by their sturdy trunks, some of them giants. Rays of morning sun filtered through in shafts of light. The ground was covered with the memory of last years leaves, laced by hopeful sprouts and patches of green.

"They're so tall!" exclaimed Karen looking upwards. "It's like they're holding up a very high ceiling."

"And look here Karen!" I had stepped carefully into the woods and discovered a patch of three-petaled white flowers with heart shaped leaves. "They're trilliums! Aren't they lovely? We had these in Massachusetts."

We wandered forth this way and that discovering lovely little flowers and green things sprouting up all over the forest floor. I named the ones I knew. We marveled at all of them.

"Oh my Gosh Karen! do you know what this is? This is really special. It's a lady slipper! It's against the law to pick these." We knelt down to admire the lovely pink and white orchid.

"Why do they call it a slipper?" Karen asked.

"Here is where the lady's leg comes down and fits into this hole in the top here, and this part below is the slipper," I explained.

"She must have really fat toes," Karen observed, but with appreciation.

Some Flowers Dianne and Karen Found in D-K Woods



Columbine



Wild Geranium



Jack-in-the-Pulpit



Lady Slipper



Trilliums



Bluebells

We wandered through the forest. We climbed over dead logs, and stirred up squirrels and a chipmunk. Here we found more trilliums, there a jack-in-the-pulpit. We thrilled at each new treasure.

"Look there!" Karen exclaimed as she ran ahead to where a huge trunk had fallen half off a tree. Karen saw it as a road going up into the sun beams and ran half way up before I realized what she was doing. I followed warily using both hands and feet. When we were about as high as we could go we were only about eight feet off the ground, but high enough that we could see past a slight swell up ahead. And oh my! Beyond a shallow valley we could see a hillside covered with small white blossoms. How lovely it was! We were aware of a background of happy chirping. An occasional bird would flit through a ray of sunlight or call to its mate.

"This whole place can be our enchanted castle with a high leafy ceiling," I said wistfully, knowing we couldn't really live there or even stay all day.

"Yes, and this tree trunk will be our couch. And look at all the dry leaves. We can use them to make our bed." Karen was getting inspired. "And the flowers and the squirrels can be our children."

"And we will be the flower fairies," I added.

Suddenly the scene was jarred by a dog's bark at the same instant a flock of small birds arose as one from the flower-covered hillside. Like the birds we also put to flight, scampering down the dead tree and crouching on the leaf strewn ground behind the log. We heard more yips and yaps and then a deep voice saying,

"Quiet Bruno! No more bunny chasing for you today!" We were frozen in place.

After a few moments Karen could take it no more. "Why are we hiding?" she whispered. I couldn't put my fear into words. Cautiously, we raised our eyes above the tree trunk and watched the man and his dog pass by at about the distance of three or four city lots, the dog looking longingly in our direction. We followed them with our eyes until they melted into the trees.

"Let's go home and see how Oscar and the kittens are doing," I whispered. Karen didn't object. Our forest had become a shade less enthralling. We walked in the direction of the flowery hillside and found that the man and dog had been walking on a path. We followed the path and it came out of the woods not far from where we had entered, and we didn't have to make like rabbits to exit.

On the way home we talked about our wonderful woods. How could it have been there all that time and we never knew? We pondered what to name it. First we thought it should be Expedition Number Two, the Old Mill Stream woods being Expedition Number I. Then we decided "The Dianne and Karen Woods" would be a better name for such a special place. Then we shortened it to the D-K Woods.

As we walked we passed people on the sidewalk; men, women, old people, children, even some with dogs. We wondered, did they know about our woods? It never occurred to us to hide from any of them. "Why were we so scared of that man and his dog?" I wondered.

"You were scared. I wasn't," Karen answered.

"Maybe not, but you sure got quiet!"

"I guess. I thought the guy might yell at us, or the dog might chase us."

"I'm sure he smelled us," I responded.

"Maybe you stink but I had a bath last night!" Karen retorted.

"I just meant dogs can ... Oh, forget it!"

Back at my place we tried to visit the kittens again, but this time Aunt Musa barred the way. She assured us there would be plenty of time to play with them in a week or two.

When Karen and I parted, we promised to visit the D-K Woods again soon. And of course we promised not to tell anyone about it because we didn't want to share it with more people. Or more dogs. The image of the beautiful living fairy castle we had discovered stayed in my mind. When I was older I heard the song, *A Green Cathedral*, and I knew just where that cathedral was and why they were singing about it. The other discovery of the day, the new found knowledge that mothers could make their own milk for their babies caused me much wonderment. What a concept! How could I not have known?

Expedition Number Three

Karen and I were becoming dedicated explorers. I had noticed a wild looking area across Prairie Avenue from where we had explored the Old Mill Stream. We were coasting down the hill towards it on a warm late May evening. The sky overhead was clear and blue, though there was a dark line ahead of us on the horizon. But we were carefree, enjoying the warm fragrant air and the lovely flowers blooming in yards we passed. We figured we had a good hour and a half to explore. I was steering. Karen was pedaling. She always pedaled on the downhill parts.

"Here, Karen!" We thumped over a bump. "I think this is where the Old Mill Stream goes under the road."

We pulled over to the south side of the road and parked the bike. We could see water dripping out of a culvert, but there didn't seem to be much of a stream. Whatever there was of it was obscured by tall dried up weeds. There didn't seem to be a path. So we pushed through the brush. Instead of the stream we found the ground generally muck yucky.

"What did you think was so special about this place?" asked Karen.

"Well, look! Over there!" I pointed through the weeds to where a gigantic tree had fallen. Now, I realize it was a cottonwood. Then, I only knew it was huge.

"Oh my!" Karen was interested again. We plowed on. The weeds weren't nice. Some had pricklers. Some were so high they scratched our faces. We pushed through them and through the mud.

"I didn't think it was so far," I commented. But Karen was fixed on the goal. When we finally reached it we discovered the tree was even larger than we had thought. It was a giant. The end of the trunk had broken off above the ground and was suspended several feet in the air and its girth rose high above our heads.

How to get up? The weeds and prickles close by made it hard to reach the lateral branches, but Karen found one not too high and hoisted herself up.

I tried to follow but couldn't quite pull myself up. I tried again and again. Meanwhile, Karen was walking up and down the trunk like a ballet dancer, straight, graceful, relaxed, and twenty feet above the ground! I was annoyed. I recently became aware I had gained over forty pounds since the beginning of fifth grade. I had entered puberty. I sometimes had cramps. I was beginning to have one right then. I was thinking, I'm just not as sprightly as I once was. Karen is. Ugh! I gave it one last try, a running leap. Instead of gaining the top of the limb I wound up in the weeds with scraped forearms. Meanwhile, Karen was prancing back and forth, like a queen, enjoying her ascendancy. I'd like to see her do this if she gained a pound or two, dozen that is. Wasn't she ever going to grow? She looked more like a fourth grader than someone about to enter junior high.

I noticed the hum of traffic from Highway 41. I could barely see it through the scrub. Then I noticed the bank of dark clouds had moved higher in the sky and the air smelled of rain.

"Karen! Come down off of there! It's going to rain!" Karen was enjoying herself. To me, she was just showing off. But after a few more turns she reluctantly returned to earth.

We plowed back through the muddy weeds, mounted the bike with me in back this time, for the long push up the hill.

"That was neat!" said Karen. "You'll have to bring the babies here someday."

"What?"

"You know, the ones that look like Mr. Waller."

"Karen! ... You were supposed to forget about that! I did." Of course I hadn't. "You didn't tell any one ... Did you?"

Silence. Giggle. Giggle. I realized to get her to tell I had to hide my racing heart. "OK," I laughed. "Out with it!" It took all my will power to pretend to be calm. "Who did you tell?"

"Mr. Waller."

"OH! You idiot! You creep! You ... "

Eek! We went over.

Karen managed to hop off the bike on the street side. I fell into the ditch with the bike landing on top of me.

"Karen how could you! You promised! It was supposed to be a secret. A very, very secret secret! I knew I should never have told you about that dream!"

"I'm sorry."

"When?"

"A couple of weeks ago."

I was still lying in the ditch with the bike on top of me. I could feel the hot tears stinging my eyes. I felt so angry, betrayed, embarrassed and ... pain! Karen pulled the bike off of me and I tried to stand up, but I couldn't. When I tried to bear weight on my right foot the pain shot through me like a lightning bolt. Besides that, it was starting to rain.

Karen stood there with her mouth hanging open.

"Well don't just stand there! Do something!" I yelled.

Some how she managed to help me up to where I could lean on the bike.

What to do? My brain was churning. I knew my Aunt was at a meeting at the Y. My dad was out with Kate. The last resort ...

"Go get Jon!"

Karen took off up the long hill, relieved to be clear of my wrath.

I stood there in the rain, on one foot, leaning against the bike, hating Karen with all my might! How would I ever be able to go to school and face Mr. Waller, with two whole endless weeks left of school?

The rain was coming harder. I was getting cold. Was Jon even home? What would Karen do if he wasn't? Just abandon me I suppose. I tried to put the tiniest weight on my foot. I found I could limp slowly forward, leaning on the bike for support. It hurt like 7734 but was better than dying in the ditch.

Finally I saw Jon coming towards me down the hill with an umbrella.

He was extremely annoyed. "Idiot! She said you were lying in a ditch and couldn't walk! I had just reached someone in New Mexico!" Jon was a newly licensed ham radio operator.

"Here you are walking just fine! I should have stayed on the air."

Limp. Limp. When he noticed I was soaking wet, muddy, bloody and crying to boot he relented. He took the other side of the bike with one hand and held the umbrella over me with the other. And somehow, we made it up the long hill and home. When I got my muddy wet clothes off I saw my ankle was very swollen and turning purple. Jon made me lie on the couch with it propped up while he tried to re-establish contact with New Mexico.

All I could think of was, "I hate you Karen! I hate you! I'll hate you for the rest of my life. I'll hate you even longer than that. I'll hate you through eternity!"

All Good Things Must Come

The ankle turned out to be a non-debilitating injury. I had to go to school the next day. There was absolutely no way around it. But a turtle could have taken lessons from me on crawling into a shell. I never held my hand up to answer a question. I didn't talk to anyone. I didn't even look at anyone. For all practical purposes I wasn't even there. The only one who noticed was Lynne. By the third day she was having a fit. She was pestering me continuously to tell her what was going on. What she finally wormed out of me was that Karen had told a very embarrassing secret to Mr. Waller. Lynne was totally sympathetic. A secret was a sacred trust between two people that shouldn't be broken unless it was a case of life and death and maybe not even then. Of course I was downcast disconsolate and weebegone! Poor Dianne! What a travesty had been done to me! I should have known better than to trust an airhead cretin like Karen. And just what was the secret? I could certainly trust Lynne with it! But I didn't.

Jon always said I had a perfect lip for pouting. I put it to use overtime with my family that week. They had to endure me until the weekend when I could be with Kate. She knew immediately that I was struggling with a problem. She was especially attentive when she sensed I was unhappy. She let me sit in the middle of the front seat between her and Daddy when we were out driving. When we were alone I told her of the terrible betrayal. She was empathetic. She said it made her sad too. She told me it reminded her of a very good friend she had had so many good times with. Then they had a problem and that friend wouldn't talk to her and after awhile she found out that friend had died and then Kate had felt just terrible! Both that the friend had died and that she, Kate, hadn't tried harder to smooth things over. The story made me sad but I insisted it wasn't like her

friend had betrayed a sacred trust. Then she reminded me of some of the wonderful adventures Karen and I had that year and how I would probably remember them for my whole life and what a precious gift it is to have a good friend and how we all make mistakes sometime and Karen probably didn't mean to tell, it just bubbled out of her. Children just aren't as responsible and dependable as adults. That's why they're children. Karen was not as adult as I was. I was more mature and wise. Perhaps I could look deep inside, remember all our good times, and see if there was some way I could stretch my heart to forgive her. I was dubious, but said I'd think about it.

We were getting down to the last few days of school and suddenly it was getting to be too much work to stay blue so I picked my chin up off my chest. The first thing I noticed was that Mr. Waller was just the same as always. Kate had said he probably paid no heed to Karen's prattling. Maybe she was right. Maybe all my grief was for naught. The second thing I noticed was that Karen kept sneaking glances in my direction.

Another bad thing happened around that time. I was riding my bike down the sidewalk by St. Johns Avenue, heading toward Highland Park, when I suddenly found myself sitting on the ground. My dearly beloved bicycle had split into two pieces with a wheel on each half. Not knowing what else to do, I tucked both halves under some nearby bushes and went on my way. Daddy came around later with the car and carted the pieces home. My excursions were suddenly limited to how far my feet could carry me.

The first day school was out SHE was on my doorstep bright and early. I answered the door and looked at Karen soberly with my arms folded.

She stood there for a moment with that absentminded Karen look and then said casually, "Want to go somewhere?"

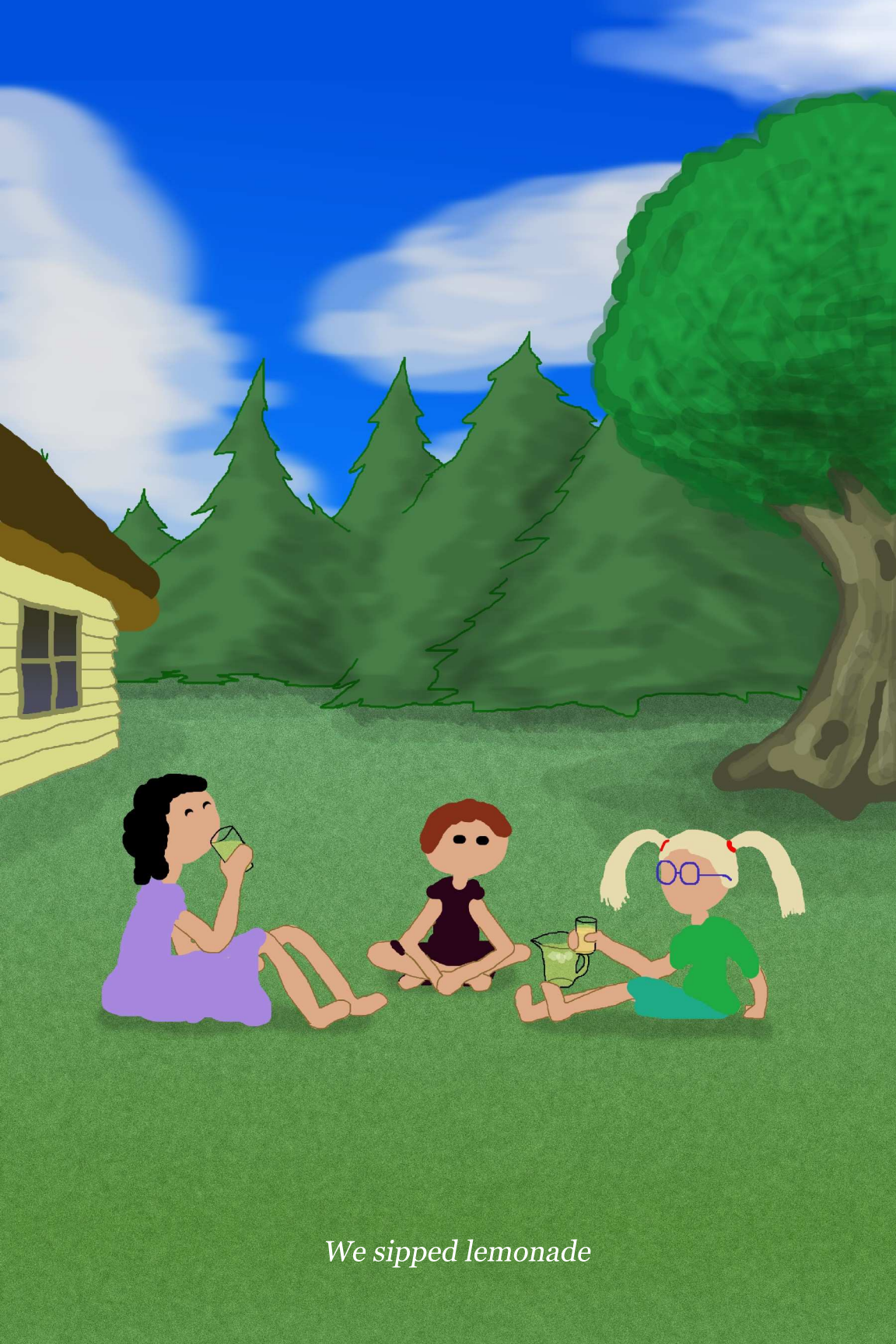
I looked past her into the fresh June air. I heard the birds chirping. I felt the warm sunshine. I said, "Sure."

We decided to walk over to Lynne's place on the Old Mill Stream path. We had no wheels. It was three miles there and another three home, but what the heck! We didn't have anything better to do. We walked in silence most of the way but it seemed okay. When we got to the path we found it lush with summer. We looked for the wreck of the old mill but we couldn't find it. We looked for where we had climbed the apple tree and buried the pot. It seemed like there were apple trees everywhere and we couldn't remember which was ours. But the stream was gurgling and the shade of the trees felt good as the day warmed.

Lynne was happy to see us. She was home alone with Marcus. She seemed surprised to see me with Karen but was glad enough of the company that she didn't mind sharing me. We sipped lemonade in the yard and talked about the year, the kids in the class, Mr. Waller.

"So when's the wedding?" asked Lynne. I assumed she meant my Dad and Kate's. Not Mr. Waller's.

"In July. Kate and I are going in to Chicago next week to buy our dresses. But then ... I hate to tell you this," and I really did, "we're moving to Waukegan. Daddy found us a new little house up there and we're moving at the end of the month." I looked sadly from one friend to the other. I was thinking of what Kate had told me about remembering these friends and our wonderful adventures for my whole life. I suddenly realized these were the two best friends I had ever had., totally different from each other



We sipped lemonade

in every way and yet, each of them, precious. I loved Lynne. I had learned so much from being with her day after day. We hadn't had so many adventures out of school, but those we did have were enchanting and she had made every day in school interesting, fun, challenging, inspiring, just great! And Karen. Oh My! Here I had gone in the space of a week from total hate to regret at having to part from her and even, loving her again.

"We're moving too," said Karen.

"Oh no!" I wasn't going to be around but I wanted Karen to still be here.

"Mom says it's not a good place to live, above a bar. She has a cousin in California who's going to help her get her own sewing shop. We're moving at the end of the month too."

"Well we're not moving," said Lynne, "but I won't be at Oak Terrace either. This area has been redistricted. I'll be going to school in Lake Forest!"

So none of us would be at Oak Terrace the following year. It seemed so sad. How would the place survive without us?

On the way home Karen and I sang all the songs we had sung all year and when we came to our school song we sang especially loud.

In the fall I would be facing another new school and new friends. It would not be so scary this next time.

And Kate was right. I would carry Karen and Lynne in my heart for the rest of my life and I would never ever forget our wonderful adventures, back in the rainbow days.

Beyond the Rainbow

The bike: After we moved to Waukegan, Daddy found a welder who welded my bike back together. I painted it light blue and rode it through the next seven years. After I got married and left home, Kate gave it away.

Mr. Waller: Mr. Waller got married that following summer. I know this only because someone saw the announcement in the newspaper and told me.

Jon: Jon put his experience of collecting junk and taking things apart to good use. He earned a PhD in electrical engineering and is still happily employed at the age of 74. He and his wife, Nancy, live near Dallas.

Aunt Musa: She rented a small apartment in Highland Park and continued to work at the YWCA. Later she moved to Billings, Montana and worked for the YWCA there. Then she came back to the YWCA in Highland Park because the Highland Park YWCA could not find anyone to adequately fill her shoes. We saw her often.

Lynne: Lynne became an English and Spanish teacher at Lake Forest Academy in Lake Forest, Illinois. She taught there 46 years. She didn't marry Michael Rennie. In fact she never married at all. She lives in Vernon Hills, Illinois and cares for her mother. We still correspond.

Karen: After one year in California, Karen's family returned, settling in Highland Park. Her mother continued her seamstress business. I saw Karen frequently throughout our high school years. Karen graduated from Highland Park High, then from nursing school, went to Afghanistan as a Peace Corps volunteer,



and earned a PhD in psychology. She was a practicing clinical psychologist in Atlanta, and later a Naturopathic Physician. In 1987 she became ill with Von Hippel-Lindau syndrome, the genetic disease which had caused her father's death in 1954. She went to Mayo Clinic and received treatment for the disorder which had not been available to her father. Karen never married. She had a lifelong relationship with Vicki, also a psychologist. After high school I had a few letters from Karen but mainly, I kept in touch with her through her mother who wrote me long newsy Christmas cards. Karen died in Atlanta in December 2009.

Daddy and Kate: They were married on July 16, 1955 at the Highwood Methodist Church by Reverend Sample. Really, the whole family married Kate. She made a peaceful happy home for all of us in Waukegan, Illinois. (Photo opposite page: The Wedding! From left: Daddy's friend Howie, Jon, Forrest (Daddy), Kathryn (Kate), Dianne, Aunt Musa (Auntie Moo)).

Dianne: I moved with my family to Waukegan, graduated from Waukegan Township High, attended the University of Chicago as a math major, and eloped during my sophomore year with the love of my life, Paul Stevens, also of Waukegan. I am the mother of four children and two wards, and grandmother of, currently, four. I cared for my parents, Forrest and Kate, in their old age. Paul and I have lived in Madison, Wisconsin for fifty years.



